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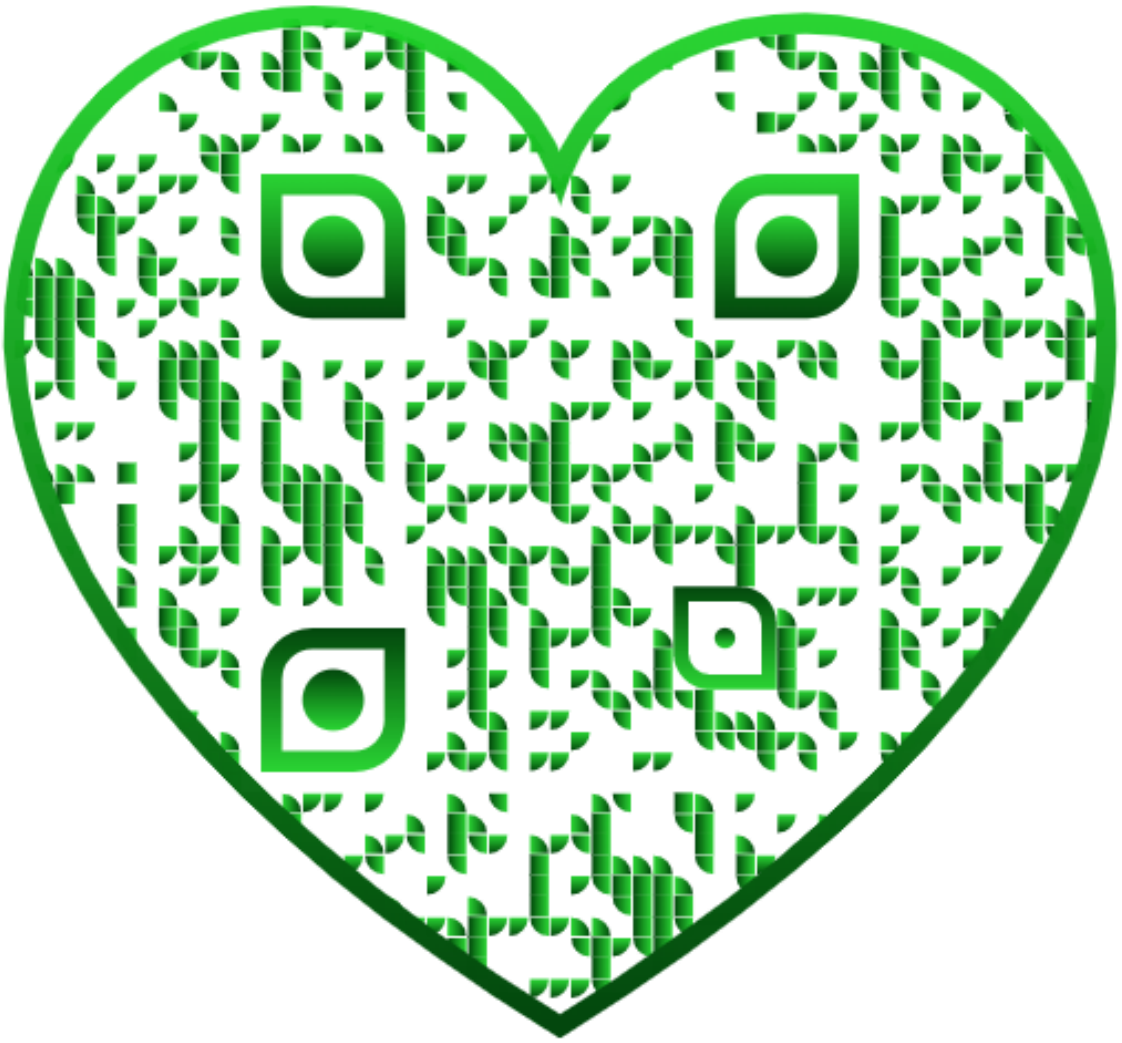
THE ULTIMATE COMPANION GUIDE TO THE LIVES AND WORK OF THE BEATLES



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Introduction

I can still remember the first time I was introduced to the Beatles. I can't claim to have met them personally, of course, but that's not what I mean. Like most people of my age, I was introduced to them through their music. In my case, that was in 1963, when I was just seven years old.

1963 was a momentous year for Britain all told. There was a savage winter that saw Britons shivering under the lowest temperatures for more than 200 years. It was the year of the Great Train Robbery and the Aldermaston March. Meanwhile, in America, Martin Luther King made his great 'I have a dream' speech, they shut down Alcatraz, and someone shot the President.

1963 was an important year in my young life, too. The family moved away from London and into our council house in what was then the New Town of Crawley. You wouldn't think it now, perhaps, but Crawley was a pretty cool place back then. It was well planned and it had trees and lakes and green fields. Our house was on the edge of a forest. I remember that everything seemed new, fresh, and exciting.

The only music I'd heard around the house until then had been toe-tapping tunes by Slim Whitman and Karl Denver, my dad's favourite artists. I still think Karl Denver was great, actually. You should do yourself a favour and hear some of his best work. Slim, on the other hand, I'm not so sure about. There was a fair amount of jazz to be heard, too, great trad jazz by Eddie Calvert, Pee Wee Hunt, and others I can't remember. Even now if I'm in the mood, a little jazz – not the modern or the mellow stuff – is just the ticket for me.

So I'd come across nothing then to prepare me for the joyous experience of hearing *Please Please Me*, *From Me to You*, *She Loves You* and *I Want to Hold Your Hand* come crackling over the wireless. They sounded great then and they still do – the best radio songs ever. I fell in love with the Beatles' music during 1963 and the love has never died.

For younger readers accustomed to the more leisurely output of popular bands today, I haven't made a mistake there: that is four – count 'em – four singles in a year, all with original B-sides. For fellow anoraks, those were *Ask Me Why*, *Thank You Girl*, *I'll Get You*, and *This Boy*, in that order. Look again, it's an astonishing list, proof that quantity and quality can sometimes mix. I remember that the first record I ever owned was an EP called *The Beatles Hits*, which was released late in 1963 and gathered together *Please Please Me*, *From Me to You*, *Thank You Girl*, and their first record, *Love Me Do*. It had some great sleeve notes by Tony Barrow, and I played that thing to death. I still have it, although it looks like someone has tap-danced on it. Oh, the joy of playing tennis racket guitar to those tunes.

I wonder how many kids like me begged to be allowed to stay up late so we could watch the Beatles on *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*? And not just to watch them perform, of course, but also to see them wave goodbye as they travelled around on that daft roundabout affair with the other acts at the end of the show.

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FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

All My Loving, **Till There Was You**, **She Loves You**, **I Saw Her Standing There**, **I Want To Hold Your Hand**, **This Boy**, **From Me To You**, **Twist And Shout** and many more.

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'The Beatles are on tonight during the *Royal Variety Performance*, Mum! Please can I stay up and see them, Dad?'

I suppose we all had our favourite Beatle, and I think mine was Paul for a long time, although as I grew up I ruthlessly abandoned him for John. In adulthood, though, I came to realise that George's work was every bit as interesting. As I grew up so did they, of course. They grew their hair long and wore moustaches and weird clothes. My Aunt Lou thought it was all a terrible shame; she thought they'd been 'lovely boys' until they 'went all strange'. She probably echoed the thoughts of many of her generation, but as they developed as a group they left the grannies and the aunts and the mums and dads far behind. And, to be truthful, Pepper was a bit much for an 11-year-old to take in.

Still, we all watched and listened as their lives continued to unfold before us in the newspapers, on the television, and on the radio. The popular media may not have been quite as greedy for celebrity gossip and scandal as it is today, but that's where we heard about Brian Epstein's death, the Maharishi-and-meditation episode, the *Magical Mystery Tour* (the first time the press really turned on them), Yoko Ono's arrival on the scene, the marriages, bed peace, the lot. I don't remember how I felt when, in 1970, it was announced that they'd split up, but I do know that I hated the idea that they all seemed to hate each other. Whatever happened to the all for one and one for all spirit of *A Hard Day's Night* and the all-boys-together house in *Help!*? It was gone – all gone.

They released their own material as solo artists after the split, of course, and there were some great albums – *Imagine* and *Band On the Run* were certainly two, and *All Things Must Pass*, which to these ears remains the best solo Beatle album of them all. Even Ringo produced a few storming singles.

Although everything they did was referenced by and compared to the Beatles, they weren't the Beatles anymore. As the years

passed, the best group that ever there was became a glorious chapter in rock history.

I found lots of new music to love in the seventies, of course – David Bowie's, for instance – although I still bear the scars from exposure to Yes, ELP, Genesis, and their like. Fantastic musicians all, but I just didn't get it. Punk was interesting for a while, although what good things there were seemed to be drowned out by the not-so-good things. The inky music press – yes, it was you, boys and girls – gave some fairly ordinary groups the big treatment, and unintentionally diluted the whole thing. Be honest – much of what seemed subversive and out-there then sounds merely quaint now.

While I was learning which bands and albums to love and which to give a wide berth, my fascination with the Beatles and their music never went away. It was in 1975 that I came across a paperback book that fired my interest and introduced me to a whole new cast of characters in their story. Costing the princely sum of 90 new pence, it was called *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away*, and it was written, along with journalist Bill Marshall, by Allan Williams.

Allan Williams's claim to fame is that he is popularly known as the Beatles' first manager. That claim still causes argument to this day, but whatever the true nature of his business relationship with the band, history records that, as the title of the his book suggests, he parted company with them in acrimonious circumstances, telling Brian Epstein, who was intending to manage the group himself, that he shouldn't 'touch them with a bargepole'.

The dispute with Williams was over unpaid commission for a stint in Hamburg, and after he ended his association with them he watched their meteoric rise to worldwide fame under Epstein's management along with the rest of the world. Williams, who liked to think he had a nose for making money, soon came to believe he had somehow missed out on a small fortune, although the

group's history would surely have been radically different had they remained his charges.

So, 15 or so years after he'd given Epstein the benefit of his advice, the time came for Allan Williams to try and earn a few quid out of his time with the Beatles by writing a book, and who could blame him? Lots of other people had done the exact same thing.

Now, there is little doubt that *The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away* was a rather fanciful book which employed a fair amount of poetic licence as it told Williams's story. John Lennon's endorsement adorned the back cover, although Paul McCartney's assessment of its merits was supposedly somewhat less charitable. Williams, however, came across as an engaging and colourful Liverpool hustler who had obviously played an important role during the formative years of the biggest band in rock history.

Tall stories notwithstanding, what I liked about his book was that it drew terrific, descriptive word pictures of Liverpool and Hamburg in the late fifties and early sixties. I loved the sweaty, grimy atmosphere which Williams created; when reading it I could almost smell the Reeperbahn, feel the excitement of the Cavern, and taste the atmosphere of the coffee bars of Liverpool. I was captivated by Williams's descriptions of those who surrounded the group itself, people who were blissfully unaware of being bit-part players in a story that would inspire songs, plays, films, and books, some of which would become familiar to millions the world over. These were gritty, gnarled characters, with all their faults and flaws, nicotine- and beer-stained products of their surroundings and the extraordinary era in which they lived.

So while the book was full of stories I hoped were true but were probably not, I didn't really care because I thought it was a cracking good read. It even introduced me to a new drink, the black and tan, which had the same effect on me as it had obviously had on Allan Williams. Above all, I wished that I'd been there

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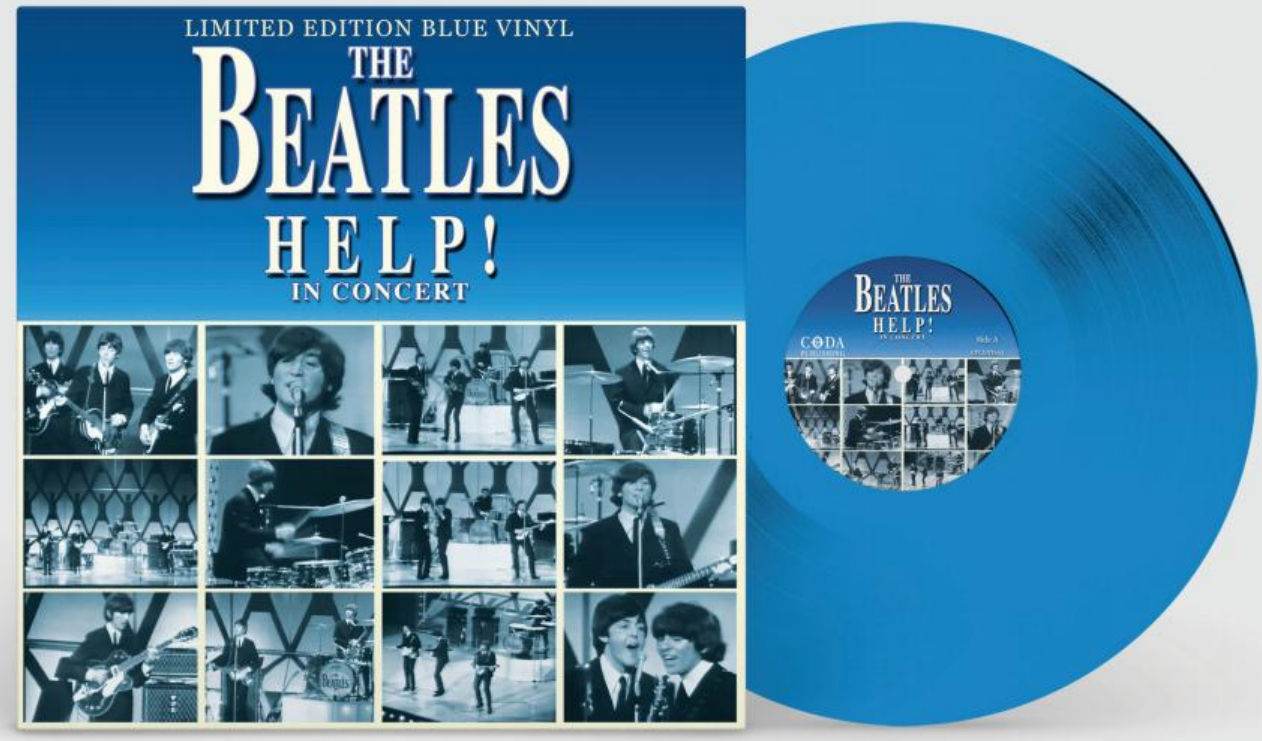

THE BEATLES – HELP! IN CONCERT

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This powerful anthology brings together the very best concert performances by The Beatles during the crucial period leading up to the launch of *Help!*. Packed with a string of powerful hits this astonishing collection features the very best of the Beatles in the Beatlemania era from 1964-'65. The performances featured here comprise the whole of the legendary Blackpool shows from 1964 and 1965. Also included is the best of the concert from Les Palais Des Sports from June 1965 making this collection essential listening for every Beatles fan.

FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

A Hard Day's Night, **Things We Said Today**, **You Can't Do That**, **If I Fell**, **Long Tall Sally**, **I Feel Fine**, **I'm Down**, **Ticket to Ride**, **Yesterday**, **Help!**, **Twist and Shout**, **She's a Woman**, **I'm a Loser**, **Can't Buy Me Love**, **Baby's In Black**, **I Wanna Be Your Man** and many more.

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to experience the excitement of it all, to feel the sheer thrill of the Liverpool music scene at that time.

What that book did was to get me interested in those other characters in the story. Some, like Pete Best and Allan Williams, had had their entire lives shaped by their involvement with the Beatles. Others had been deeply involved with them and passed through into new Beatle-free lives. The common thread was that none of them had been unaffected by their Beatles experience.

This book is a collection of new interviews or extracts from interviews recently given by some of those people. All of them are now in late middle age or in old age, but each has a bagful of Beatle memories, and it's interesting to see how the passing years have affected their perspective. I was struck, for example, by how Pete Best seems free from bitterness today about the way in which he was treated, while Norman Smith, who engineered those early records I so love, feels that he has never received due credit for his part in developing the Beatles sound. Tony Barrow simply seems proud of his role in unleashing Beatlemania on an unsuspecting world, and why wouldn't he? As a key member of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, Neil Innes remains faintly amused – perhaps bemused – that he was ever involved in the *Magical Mystery Tour*, or that Paul McCartney produced and played on one of his own records.

As I wrote at the beginning of this piece, I was introduced to the Beatles but I never met them, and on the whole I think that's a good thing. Along with millions of others, my memories of them are enshrined in the songs and the music and the films. Nothing can spoil them; they're mine and they can't be touched.

For those featured in this book it was not quite the same; in their own completely different ways, to some degree or another, they were actually part of popular music's most enduring and fascinating saga. What follows are some of their recollections and memories, which I sincerely hope you will enjoy reading.

Pete Best

It must be an extraordinary thing to have your life defined or changed forever by a single unexpected event, by something climactic that happens to you and alters your life completely, or that determines how people will always remember you. Terry Waite and John McCarthy, for instance, will surely always be remembered by most people as hostages; fewer would be able to tell you what they were doing with themselves before they were put through that awful ordeal. As another example, the only reason people remember football pools winner Viv Nicholson is because her promise to 'spend, spend, spend' her winnings made her a public figure overnight in 1961, and much good it did her.

There are countless instances of things happening to people that affect their lives forever. One of those people was Pete Best, the Beatles' original drummer, and the event that changed his life occurred in August 1962.

That's when he was summoned to the NEMS offices to be told by a highly flustered Brian Epstein that the rest of the Beatles

had decided they wanted him out of the group and Ringo Starr brought in to replace him on drums. Best maintains to this day that he had no inkling of what they were planning and that the sacking came like a bolt out of the blue; he'd gone to Epstein's office that morning expecting to discuss upcoming Beatles engagements and gigs.

As if suddenly finding he longer had a job was not enough, the timing for Pete Best could hardly have been worse. By common consent, the Beatles were about to hit the big time. Only a few days after the sacking, Granada Television's cameras were at the Cavern to record a Beatles show there, having been alerted to their incredible popularity in the northwest of England. The group was also due to make its first record, which would see them take the first steps on the road to national and international superstardom. Pete Best had to watch it all happen knowing that he could – and perhaps should – have been part of the whole Beatle phenomenon.

What must really have gnawed away at him was that he never got a proper explanation for his sacking. The entire 'Why was he fired?' episode is now part of rock folklore, and Pete Best has had to live with it all his life; a day can't go by without him being reminded of it.

When the Beatles were planning their definitive *Anthology* project in the mid-nineties, rumours were about that they'd take the opportunity to put the whole thing to rest. They didn't, of course. George Harrison made vague references to Best's supposed unreliability, saying, 'Historically, it might have looked like we did something nasty to Pete,' and suggested that, anyway, Ringo joining the group was somehow simply meant to be.

Clear as mud, then. Although he had to wait 30-odd years, at least Best finally got some reward for his time with the band. They used some of his Hamburg, Decca, and Parlophone performances on the *Anthology* CDs and his share of the royalties was reported

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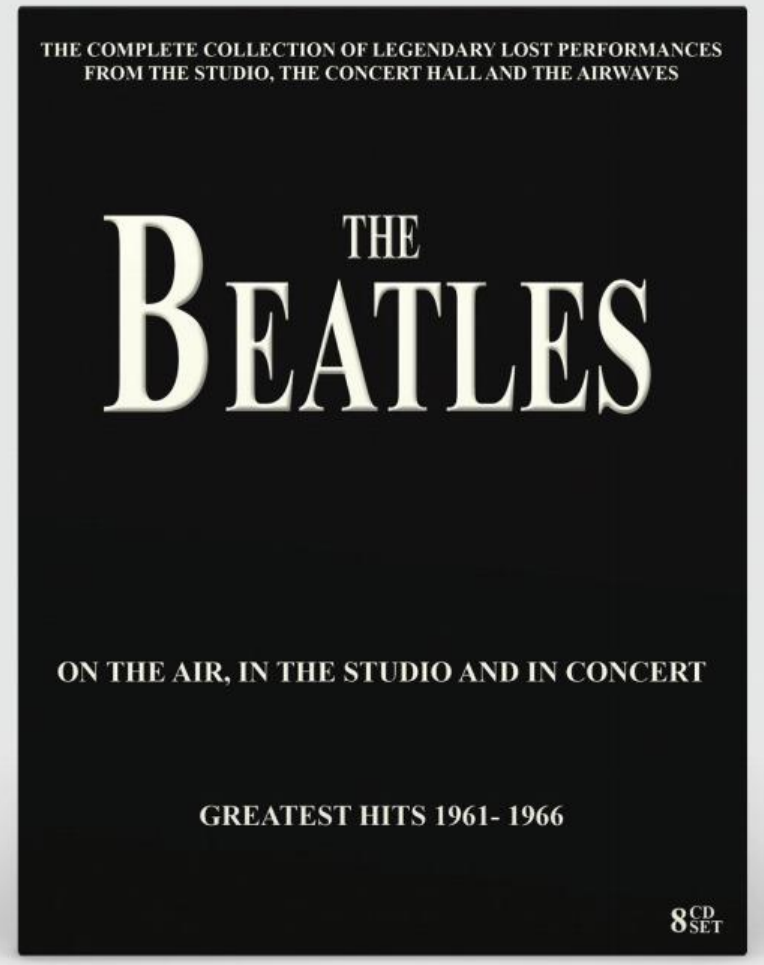

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to have been substantial. There can't be many around who'd say he didn't deserve it.

Q Pete, when did music first come into your life?

Like a lot of teenagers in Liverpool, it was when rock and roll and the folk scene or skiffle or whatever it was started playing on the radio. I was captivated by the music, the sounds that were coming out. But I suppose my real love affair with music began when my mother opened the Kasbah Club in 1959. Liverpool was always a hotbed for music, though, even before the fifties. In the forties, many of the big bands came from Liverpool.

I'd seen it on the television and watched it on stage, but when the Kasbah opened in 1959, I could actually see bands performing down there and rubbed shoulders with some of them. It was very much the case of always being influenced by Gene Krupa on the

Click the above photo for a video link

Ex-Beatle Pete Best describes getting to know the Beatles.

drumming side, because people turn round and said, 'You know, you have natural rhythm, you love music, you love dancing, you like going out, et cetera, et cetera.'

Like most kids in Liverpool, I started off on a guitar, but I wasn't comfy with it. It was just the usual three chords and it was like, 'Nah, I'm not getting the hang of this.'

But drumming – that was different. I was told I had natural rhythm, so I was banging pots, tables, just this, that, and the other, and I thought, 'Right – this is my thing.' So, by watching old movies with Gene Krupa in and actually seeing drums getting played in the cellar by different bands from Liverpool, I became captivated by them.

When the opportunity came to actually form a band, it was like, 'I want to be the drummer', or they would say, 'You are going to be the drummer,' and that's how I became involved. I started off with a little band called the Black Jacks, which played the Kasbah and the local scene. Then, of course, the rest is history in a way – the Beatles, the Kurzers, the Pete Best Band – everything in its sequence.

Q What your mum [Mona Best] was doing in Liverpool was pretty unusual, wasn't it?

It was. Coffee bars were in vogue in those days, she got the idea from the Two I's in London. Of course, Alan Williams had the Jacaranda in Liverpool, along with a few other places, but what she wanted was not just another coffee bar; she wanted a coffee club. It was slightly different. Her idea was she wanted to bring music to the kids, which wasn't happening in coffee bars in Liverpool. That's where the Quarrymen really began, you know; John, George, Paul, and Ken Brown. It was how I got involved with them.

The Kasbah was going to be somewhere with the right décor, where young people could meet in a friendly environment and enjoy themselves. It was a very family-orientated atmosphere where

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FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

Love Me Do, **P.S. I Love You**, **I Saw Her Standing There**, **Misery**, **Please Please Me**, **A Hard Day's Night**, **Things We Said Today**, **You Can't Do That**, **If I Fell**, **From Me to You**, **She Loves You**, **I Want to Hold Your Hand**, **Can't Buy Me Love**, **I Feel Fine**, **Ticket to Ride**, **Yesterday**, **Help!** and **Act Naturally**.

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adults could come as well if they wanted, but predominantly it was kids that came initially, until the word got out.

But she wanted it to be different; she wanted it to be a safe haven. She wanted kids off the streets, somewhere they could come and be themselves. And the décor was very different, with her eastern influences. There was the Aztec ceiling and the famous Kasbah dragon on the wall. You know, very different things, like walls being clad in timber, which was unheard-of in those days. She had great ideas for the floor and the lights and when word got out, we had a membership of something like 300 before the club even opened.

Opening night, 29 August 1959, was absolutely incredible. There were queues down the path. We were due to open at half-past seven. We delayed the band going on stage because people were still waiting to get in. We had to sign them up. Instead of just signing at the back door, we were signing them in the kitchen, everywhere we could take the membership money. It was a fantastic night with an unforgettable atmosphere.

The kids absolutely loved it, but I could tell then, already, after that opening night, that my mother had other ideas for the club. Opening night had been a huge success, but she developed it and built it – from bands playing one night a week to playing over the weekend, from there to playing seven nights week. It never closed, and just about every household name on the Liverpool music scene played there.

The beauty of it was that she gave an opportunity to young bands as well, you know; she auditioned bands. She knew a good band when she saw one. It was, like, if you go down well at the Kasbah you get another gig. If you don't, go away and rehearse and come back again and maybe we'll try you out again.

Bands just loved it. They loved that philosophy. You know, she was getting them from all over town; you know, one night you could see the Beatles, the next night the Searchers, or Gerry

[Marsden]. I could go on and on and on. Another night it might be an audition band. But they all got treated the same by Mo, and within a short period of time she turned this little humble coffee club into what became the catalyst for the Merseybeat sound.

That's what we have said. Long before the Cavern, which was a jazz cellar, the Kasbah was thriving as a rock 'n' roll club. I think that's what we must emphasise when we are talking to people about the early music scene in Liverpool.

Q And that's the place where you and the Beatles cut your teeth?

Yeah, and got a few pulled as well. I actually got to know them as the Quarrymen, because the band that should have opened the Kasbah broke up a couple of weeks beforehand, and Ken Brown and George Harrison came down and saw my mother Mona and said, 'Mo, we've got bad news for you. The band has broken up.'

Of course, it was like, God, we've only got a couple of weeks to opening night! What are we going to do? George turned round and said he happened to know a couple of guys who weren't doing anything, and maybe they'd be interested, because it was going to be a residency, and residencies for a young band was like striking gold in those days.

So, my mother, in her infinite wisdom, asked George to bring them down the next day. So lo and behold, who showed up but John Lennon and Paul McCartney? She put the deal to them – it was a residency, and they would be playing for the princely sum of £3, which was like, wow, 15 shillings each! A lot of money in 1959.

They said, 'We would love to play here,' and the deal was done then. Then she said, 'Hang on a minute, what are you going to call yourselves? John said well, we used to be called the Quarrymen, so that's what we'll call ourselves. It was that line-up that opened the club: John, George, Paul and Ken Brown. They didn't have a drummer.

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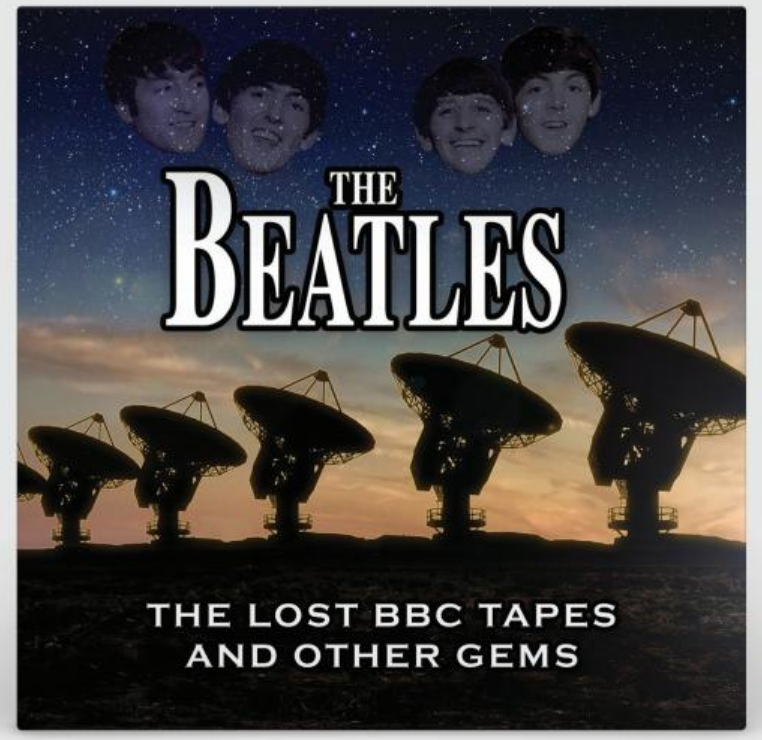

THE BEATLES - THE LOST BBC TAPES & OTHER GEMS

Limited Edition CD

During 1963 and 1964 the BBC championed the rise of the Beatles. The BBC Saturday Club broadcast on 16 March was unusual as it was made live to air. The impact of the frequent radio and TV broadcasts fuelled the global Beatlemania phenomenon and propelled the Beatles to new heights. Featured in this remarkable collection are a string of immortal hits performed during live broadcasts in the UK, USA and Australia all of which were performed live and broadcast straight to air.

FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

Love Me Do, **P.S. I Love You**, **She Loves You**, **Twist and Shout**,
I Saw Her Standing There, **Misery**, **Too Much Monkey Business**, **I'm Talking About You**,
Please Please Me, **I'll Get You**, **Hippy Hippy Shake**, **From Me to You**,
I Want to Hold Your Hand, **This Boy** and **All My Loving**.

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Q What were your impressions of them in those very early days?

I was fortunate I think, because I got to know them on a social level before I actually joined the band in 1960. I think the more you mixed with them, the more you came to appreciate and understand their humour. I was knocked out by John the first time I saw him. I just loved the way he looked – his image, the way he handled himself, the little quips he made. You know, he had that quirky sense of humour. Sometimes I was doubled up in stitches before he'd even come into the club.

Paul was very much the PR guy, you know – the businessman. He was very prim and proper: 'What's the deal, Mona?' That type of thing.

George was the youngest guy in the band, so he was kind of the junior member, but when he got into their company he became just like them. I just found they were dead easy to get on with. Of course, with them playing here, socialising here, mixing upstairs in the kitchen, coming to the famous Kasbah parties that used to take place upstairs, I got to know them very well.

Of course, when I actually auditioned for them, the offer came to go to Germany in 1960. It wasn't like an audition for a new band, it was like auditioning for a gang of mates. We were all playing the same music, we had all done the same thing, we had all played the same clubs. It was just the fact that they were one of the first bands that went out to Germany and they asked me, and that's how joined them.

Q Tell me what you thought of Stuart [Sutcliffe, the fifth member of the Beatles when they played in Hamburg].

The first time I met Stu was in the Kasbah. He was very arty. I'd say that John, the first time I met him, was most probably the one with the arty sideburns and the rolled collar and all the rest, but when I saw Stu, he was more artistic-looking than even John was.

He had that image. I think the first time I saw him what struck me was that he had an uncanny resemblance to James Dean. You know, the way he swept his hair back, the way he wore his sunglasses – in the middle of the club he would sit there with his sunglasses on, and that was the bohemian look in those days. That was an art student.

He was very quiet until you got to know him, and then you saw that, yeah, deep down he wanted to become a musician. He was a brilliant artist. The world knows that today; that goes without saying, but he was coerced into becoming a member of the Beatles. He had his arm twisted, and that happened in the Kasbah. He'd had a painting on show at the John Moore's exhibition, and that had earned him 50 or 60 quid. Of course, they needed a bass player, and guess what – he was the guy! The only drawback was he couldn't play, but they said buy a bass and you can join the band and we'll show you how.

Then, of course, after that we were on our way to Hamburg in Germany, and it was very much everyone living in everyone's pocket. We were in one another's company 24 hours a day.

Q Hamburg – what an amazing adventure for five young men…

It was. Even though none of us admitted it, I think we all had a parental chat before we got on the bus – the usual things! I can imagine each parent saying the same thing. You know, you are going to Hamburg, enjoy it but be careful – you know how it is!

But we didn't know. We knew we were going to a place called Hamburg, and that's about all we knew. We were excited about the fact that we were most probably only the second band from Liverpool to go. Derry and the Seniors were the first ones out there. Alan Williams was responsible for it, for taking us out, and as he always said, he smuggled us into Hamburg the first time. We didn't know we had to have papers and work permits and all that

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type of thing. It was just, 'You're students. Leave it up to me and we'll get you in there.'

But there was great excitement in the van certainly, because we just didn't know what to expect. We knew Hamburg was a port, like Liverpool was a port, but when we actually got there and hit the Reeperbahn – that was absolutely incredible. You have to remember we were just, what?, 17-18 years old. We hit these amazing neon lights which just sort of lit the whole thing up, a mile and a half, or whatever it is. It made Blackpool Illuminations look like a little fairy town.

And it was absolutely heaving. The crowd was out, the atmosphere was out, and of course we suddenly realised that this was St Pauli. This was the red-light district, and the more we got to know it, when we found out where we were playing and the hours we had to play it became like a second home to us. St Pauli, even though it was one of the most famous red-light districts in the world, it was our playground, and that's what we loved about the place. It was great.

Q But a very tough work schedule…

It was very hard. We thought we were going to be playing in the Kaiserkellar, and of course we weren't. We were playing in the grotty old Indra down at the bottom end of the Grosse Freiheit, which was off the Reeperbahn. The challenge was for us to turn this little club into a second Kaiserkellar, which we eventually did.

We were told we'd be playing seven hours a night, 15 minutes off every hour. It was a hell of a challenge, because no one from Liverpool had played those hours before. It was like, okay, that sounds tough – how do we do it? Right, so we built ourselves up. We adjusted to it. As the crowds built up, there would be certain periods in the sets when we wouldn't have to be so frantic and energetic as we were when it was a full house, so we would pace ourselves. We would add solos into numbers to make them last longer.

So on a hot night, when the crowds were packed in, you might get a version of *What'd I Say* which would last about 15 minutes, but the crowds loved it. As long as they were up and yelling for more, we were up for playing more. If the crowd emptied a little bit, we'd take it down a step. We became very professional. We grew up at the Indra.

Q And at this stage the material was all cover versions? Was there any songwriting being done?

Not at that stage. Not on the first trip out. I mean, I was aware of the fact that they had written songs when they were 15 and 16, but I hadn't heard any of them. What we were doing at that time was all covers. Most of the bands in Liverpool were doing covers of Little Richard, Chuck Berry, the Everley Brothers. We were fortunate because of the singers we had in the band; they were very good harmony-wise. Each singer had their own specialty. John was Chuck Berry and Gene Vincent, Paul was Little Richard and Ray Charles, George was Carl Perkins and Eddie Cochran. So they were the sounds we were playing. That's what we cut our teeth on.

I think when we started to establish ourselves in Liverpool, and on the second trip back to Germany, that's when we started to experiment a little bit. We thought, 'Okay, let's throw in a couple of songs that we've written ourselves.'

When we came back to Liverpool, we were one hell of a band. The image, the type of music we were playing, the style of it, the savageness of it, the power of it – it just blew people away. Audiences had never seen anything like it before, but here we were, five lads from Liverpool, delivering it right to your doorstep!

A lot of bands in Liverpool changed overnight as a result of seeing us. You know, they had been very lightweight before that, a little bit like Cliff Richard and the Shadows, dressed in sparkly suits, very clean-cut. All of a sudden – leather jackets everywhere! Everyone had a leather jacket and there was a kind of muse all over Liverpool.

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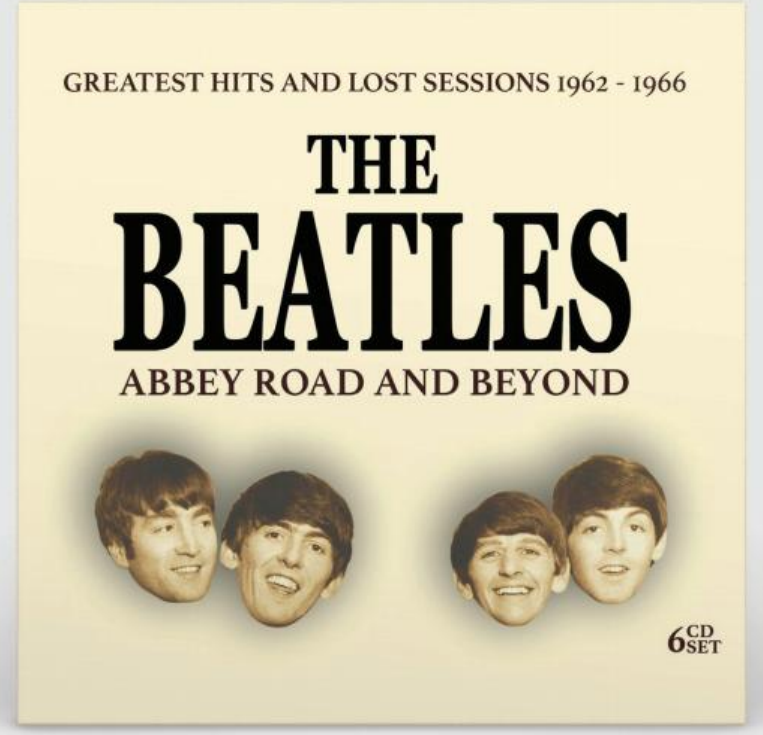

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Love of the Loved, **Love Me Do**, **P.S. I Love You**, **There's a Place**, **I Saw Her Standing There**, **Misery**, **A Hard Day's Night**, **Please Please Me**, **Hippy Hippy Shake**, **She Loves You**, **Twist and Shout**, **From Me to You**, **This Boy**, **I Want to Hold Your Hand**, **All My Loving**, **Can't Buy Me Love**, **Long Tall Sally**, **Ticket to Ride**, **Yesterday**, **Help!**, **Day Tripper**, **Paperback Writer** and many more.

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Their images changed; the type of material they were playing became very heavy and frenetic. It was what the Merseybeat sound is remembered for today – what it's recognised for.

To be one step ahead of them all, that was the goal. They may have been writing songs, but they didn't have the courage to perform them on stage. That was our big thing, and it was something else that set us apart – when you could say from the stage, 'Here's a song which we've written ourselves,' and then play it.

At first, you could feel there was an atmosphere in the audience – 'Hang on a minute, what's this going to be like?' Fortunately, we had great song writers – Lennon and McCartney – so even their early stuff, of course it's world famous now, songs like *Love of the Loved*, they went down fantastically well with the audience. They loved them. Of course, then it was, 'The Beatles are writing their own material,' and everyone started writing in Liverpool.

Q It must have given you a hell of a kick, doing your own stuff…
Well, the songs were more personal, and the lads used to play it up, don't get me wrong. They loved introducing one of the songs that they had written. Paul introducing *Like Dreamers Do*, for example. It was a great number, and it was it was one of the originals that we did at the Decca audition. We liked it that much. It went down that well with the crowds and there always used to be a glint in Macca's eye when he did it. When he announced it he would pick out a girl in the audience, and of course they would all be in the front row, and it was like, bang, 'Oooh – Paul's talking to me.'

It was a part of being professional and adding another dimension to the band which other bands couldn't do.

Q So, you felt much more confident during the second trip to Hamburg?
We'd conquered Hamburg as far as we were concerned. We had done our four months there, which should only have been a

month. We were kicked out on our way back. We came back a new band.

But in my opinion, Beatlemania really started at the Kasbah when we got back, regardless of what other people say. Some reckon that it was that show at the Litherland Town Hall, on 27 December, 1962. It wasn't. The first gig we did in Liverpool when we returned from the second trip to Hamburg was at the Kasbah.

That particular night, the first night the Beatles played here after Hamburg, the reaction from the Liverpool audiences was – well, you couldn't move in here. Health and Safety? Didn't exist! The word went out on the street and it was like, we've got to go and see the Beatles. We took Liverpool by storm.

We'd been virtually unknown before we went out to Germany, but when we came back we delivered this powerhouse show that had every promoter in Liverpool screaming out for us. When we

Click the above photo for a video link

Former Beatle Pete Best reminisces about the Beatles' time in Germany.

went back to Hamburg the second time, it was to a different club. It was the Top Ten club, which was the best club in town at that time. The audiences were a little more upbeat, even though the crowd from the Kaiserkeller still came, because that's was the only place they could see the Beatles. So Peter Eckhorn, who owned the Top Ten, was rubbing his hands because the Kaiserkellar was his rival round the corner and it was having a hard time. He had Tony Sheridan, who was the house musician; he had the Beatles, and they were the two biggest names in Hamburg, and he had them under one roof, playing on the same stage. His club was packed every night and we were riding high. We were big-headed little buggers from Liverpool, but we were proud of what we had done. And we were still having fun.

Q Do you feel you needed to go back to Hamburg the second time?

I think we needed to go back, and anyway, we'd promised Peter Eckhorn that we would go back and play there. It was all dance halls in Liverpool, and we felt that the opportunity we had in Hamburg, playing in a club as a residential band, was something which wasn't going to happen in Liverpool. And we were playing great. We were playing seven nights a week. A lot of other bands were playing only once or twice a week.

But going back there and playing under one roof and being in the public eye all the time was fantastic, and Hamburg was fast becoming a music city as well. A lot of music-industry people in Hamburg were starting to take an interest in what we would call English music, or English artists that were appearing over there, too. So, it was great to go back to and it was during that second trip that Bert Kampfurt signed us up, which marvellous for us.

Q How did that come about?

We'd been playing at the Top Ten for about three months, and

round about the middle of May we were told by Peter Eckhorn that Bert, who was the biggest record manager in Germany at that time, a big cheese at Polydor records, was interested. People had seen the band, given him some feedback, and he was interested in seeing it all for himself. He came down and watched us a couple of times, and we always got the tip-off from the manager of the club when he was in the audience. 'Boys, Bert Kampfurt is in tonight!'

And away we would go. We'd do some of the choice numbers to impress, you know. But he was impressed with the band, anyway; he particularly liked the harmonies. He liked Sheridan, too, the combination of the two together, and the fact that he could record Tony by himself and the Beatles by themselves. So, one particular night when we'd finished playing he called us over and said he'd love to record us and sign us up. We set a date. We were going to record in Germany for the Polydor label and that date was set for sometime in June, just before we left. Over those two days we recorded *My Bonnie*, *Cry Free Shadow* and *Ain't She Sweet*, which are all famous songs now in the Beatles story.

Q Didn't you have to change your names slightly, to the Beat Boys? What was that all about?

Well. I think that was some good old German business nous by Bert. He realised that the Beatles weren't going to be around in Hamburg indefinitely, and he wanted a band that could include any members, not necessarily the ones on the record, if it did well. The Beat Boys – well, it could be anyone, couldn't it? But there's only one group called the Beatles.

It caused a bit of confusion when the records were released years afterwards, but it got sorted eventually and people came to realise which were Beatle tracks and which weren't.

There was also another reason, which was quite humorous, actually. Another tale in the Beat Brothers saga! In Hamburg, in the St Pauli area, there was lot of German slang spoken. Not

surprising, really. Well, there was a word in the German slang vocabulary at that time, I don't think it exists any more now, but it was for the male appendage, and it was called the peadle. Old Bert got a bit concerned. The Beatles, the Peadles – a bit close for comfort. So, that was another reason why he said, 'Guys it's got to be the Beat Brothers until the record company sorts it out.'

Q How did you wind down between shows?

Like any mad musician would do, I guess! We were all fond of having a drink. Women were abundant and we were healthy young lads. We enjoyed ourselves. It was a case of having to. I think about it sometimes now, and we were doing things that by today's standards might be pretty tame, but to us in those days – drinking and orgies, this was rock and roll, man!

We were in the middle of Hamburg, in the red-light district, with women fawning over us left, right, and centre from every walk of life. You know, from high-class prostitutes down to homely girls on the street. So we enjoyed ourselves, shall we say.

We worked long hours we had to let off steam. We did what we felt was right and there was nothing malicious about it. I'm certain it still goes on today, you know. You ask any musician travelling the world, but in those days it was, you know, things you couldn't do in Liverpool you could do in Hamburg. So we did them. And we enjoyed doing them.

Q Was Neil Aspinall your roadie at this point?

Neil, I think, became roadie just before we went out to Hamburg for the second time. Neil – the man with the van. He bought a van because we needed a permanent road manager. Frank, the bouncer from the club, who had been running us to the gigs said he couldn't manage two things. It was great for us to have Frank, to have a bouncer as a road manager. If you got into any trouble at any of the dance halls he would sort it out for you. When Frank

said, 'Look, the Kasbah is booming,' we're talking about 1961 now, 'you know the crowds are fantastic and I can't afford to take the time off to be away from the club.'

So his loyalty was to the club, and making sure everything ran okay there. Neil by this time had become firm friends with the family. We said, 'Look, there's a job going here, make a few bob for yourself. Work during the day and run us around at night time,' and he went out and bought an old banger, which got us from A to B. As we progressed and as more work came in he became a full-time road manager, and God bless him, you know, all the success he's had he deserves. Worked his way up from a humble road manager to being Apple's main man, you know, which is great. He deserves all the credit he gets.

Q What was the reception like in Liverpool when you returned after the second trip?

We were Polydor recording artists! That was the big word on the street because we were one of the first bands to be signed up. It didn't matter that it was a German label; it was the biggest German label. Of course, it was great for the posters and the publicity and everything else. The crowds were great. They wanted us back. We had been away three months, and their favourite band, or one of their favourite bands, was coming back home again. We were going to be playing the local scenes. We were going to play the Kasbah, the Cavern, you know, all the local haunts. We were back in town again. Kids in Liverpool could see us and not just hear about us. The fact that we came back as recording artists made things all the more exciting.

Q And you came back as a four-piece…

We came back a foursome because Stu had decided he was going to go to Hamburg College of Art. So that was a little bit of a shock for some people in Liverpool. They were expecting to see Stu come

back again. It wasn't that it made any difference to the band. It was still powerhouse, they were still hearing the same songs, just with Paul on bass. They were still getting belted out in the same energetic fashion, and to be quite honest, the kids didn't care. The important thing to them was that Beatles were back, no matter what the line-up was.

We just went from strength to strength, and consequently a certain Brian Epstein started to take an interest, with people going into the shops and asking about us. You know the famous Raymond Jones story? That's actually true. A lot of people think that's a made-up story. There was a Raymond Jones and he did ask for *My Bonnie*.

Brian – Raymond said it was by the Beatles, which it wasn't – found out that it was Tony Sheridan and the Beat Brothers, as we were discussing before. But he said to Brian, 'You've got to go and see them. They're playing at the Cavern down the road. You've got to go there, mister, and watch them; they're the best band you'll ever see in your life.'

I think Brian had read about us in the Mersey Beat as well. We had always been in NEMS, making a nuisance of ourselves, because the minute we walked into NEMS and listened to the records in the booths they used to have in those days, the shop would come to a standstill and the girls behind the counter would go, 'Oh God, it's the Beatles. Do you want to listen to the new releases? Yeah, okay!' There would be mayhem going on, to be quite honest. He must have known who we were, and his curiosity got the better of him. 'Who the hell are these Beatles? I've got to go and see them.'

As the story goes, he went down to the Cavern. Stood in the shadows, watched the Beatles, fell in love with them, and the next thing we knew was a message passed down to us, and Brian wanted to sign us up and become manager, which is what he did eventually.

Q Do you remember him being there at all? Do you remember that night or was it kind of you heard the week after he'd been there?

The message that Mr. Epstein was in the Cavern was passed to us via Bob Wooler, who was the Cavern DJ. Later we heard that he would like to see the Beatles in the afternoon, during office hours, but he didn't actually give us that message to us in person. It was passed on by other people, and we said, 'Okay, we'll go for a couple of pints first,' which we normally would after a dinner-time session, then stroll down the road to NEMS, go and see Brian and see what he wants.

To be honest, he was very fair about it. He said, 'I've heard a lot about you. I've seen you actually perform and I like what you are doing. I like the charisma of the band, the way the band handles itself. I'm interested in going into management, managing a band. I have never done it before, but let's give it a go. No strings attached; if it works, fine. If it doesn't work, we all walk.'

So we said, 'Yes, seems fair enough.' We said, 'Okay we'll go and talk it over amongst ourselves.' We chatted it through with our parents, which you would normally do with a decision like that. The consensus of opinion was, okay, its Brian Epstein. He's the manager of NEMS. He's rich, drives a big white car, wears a suit. He's very respectable, well-thought-of, and has good contacts with the record companies. We'll give it a go. We went back and told Brian, but we said if it doesn't work, you'll go your way and we'll go ours, but the world knows now what did he do for them. He made them the biggest showbiz phenomenon in the world.

Q So how had you been functioning before Brian came on the scene? There was Alan Williams. There was also your mum, but who had been promoting you and looking after you and doing all the hard work?

Well, we finished with Alan over a percentage disagreement. When we came back to Liverpool someone needed to take the bookings

and take the responsibility for getting us from A to B and fixing prices and all the other bits and pieces, so my mother helped us as much as she could. But what you have to realise is that she was still heavily involved with the Kasbah, but she did what she could. I became more or less the point of contact if you wanted to book the Beatles. You know, phone Pete.

To be quite honest, I was handling the business side of it, although not on a managerial level. We didn't think we needed it before Brian came along. You'd look at the diary and we'd be playing two or three times a day sometimes, and as long as we were getting the money at the end of the week we were quite happy. You know, we were going places and we had a full diary. We had Neil, you know, our full-time roadie now, running us around. We were quite happy.

Where other bands were struggling as regards getting the money they wanted, we were forcing promoters to put the price up, which was great, and of course, once we forced the promoters to put the price up, other bands followed, so it was a little bit like Beatle blackmail! You want us – you pay us. But the other bands caught on to it as well, and because of that, promoters that had been paying lesser bands peanuts, suddenly started to fork out decent money for a good band to play at their venue.

It was fortunate, I suppose, but we didn't have to go and look for work. Other bands had to phone promoters and ask for bookings. We didn't have to. The phone was red-hot here. We never got in touch with promoters. Actually, Mo did. She rang Granada TV to let them know about the Beatles, that there was this band in Liverpool taking everything apart, but as regards routine bookings, they came to us, which was great.

Q How did life as a Beatle change when you were managed by Brian Epstein?

He changed certain things we did, and at first we weren't happy

with it, to be honest, but I think of it like this: he'd got a rough diamond. He'd got this priceless 24-carat diamond there, and he had to polish it. He'd say, 'I like the way you are on stage, but I'd like you to be more professional,' and he started to groom us. That's the word – groom.

We'd been drinking and smoking on stage, for example. Well, it was, like, that's out. We had performed shows sometimes where we didn't have a set list; we would just fire off one after the other. What number are you doing next, oh so and so, that's fine. The crowd loved it. They're happy, we're happy. Brian wasn't, though. He introduced set lists. Strict times that we had to be at venues before a show – not rolling up five minutes before and with a pie in your hand.

And, of course, the big thing was he had us put into suits. We had lived in leathers for two years, so John and I were very unhappy about it, going into suits. We compromised, you know, certain venues we wore suits and other venues we wore the leathers. Until, eventually, Beatle suits and Beatle hairstyles all became very fashionable. But that was what Brian did. He began to groom us for the next step.

Q And the next big step was a record deal here in Britain…

What we wanted was an English recording contract. That was the important thing. We had this recording contract in Germany, but because of the sheer economics of it having to go over there to record, we felt, now hang on a minute – we need a record company in England: Decca, EMI, or someone.

Decca was the biggest, so lets try and get a deal with them, and that was the mission we gave Brian. He went to them because of his contacts in the record industry. He went to the biggest record company going at the time, Decca, and bent the ear of Mike Smith, dear old Mike, to come down and watch the Beatles at the Cavern. He was absolutely knocked out with us. Hence, you know,

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the famous, or infamous, Decca auditions of 1962. That was the speed Brian was moving. Remember, he'd only been our manager for a couple of months. So, to land an audition within a couple of months with the biggest record company in England, as well as grooming us, and polishing us – it's not as if we could say he wasn't doing anything! He was, you know – he was flying.

Q What were the Decca recording sessions like?

This was an audition and it was a very important audition, and Brian went to great lengths to tell us about before we went down there that we must be in bed early. Of course, half past two in the morning, we are in the middle of Trafalgar Square, doing certain things which we shouldn't be doing. Got to the session hung over. It was New Years Day. The excitement was certainly there.

We played about 14 or 15 numbers. Not our choice, but Brian's, and if there's one thing Brian got wrong, I'd say it was the material that he made us play on that particular day. It didn't do us any justice. I could see the thinking in that he wanted to show Decca the cross-section of material, from out and out rock, to great harmonies, to country and western, to the original songs, but, as Mike Smith said, what he saw in the Cavern didn't come over in the studio. That was one of the reasons why we never got the gig with Decca.

Q How did you feel after being turned down by Decca?

I think we felt desperate more than anything else. We thought that we had Decca's contract in the bag. The final words from Mike Smith as we left were, 'Don't worry, lads'. We even went out and celebrated. St Johns Wood, big lavish dinner, on Brian of course. The wine was flowing, and we all came back in high spirits. Then, a couple of weeks afterwards, we were told that Decca had turned us down. I think they signed Mike Poole and the Tremolos instead. So, that was like a red rag to a bull to us.

We said, 'Okay, Brian, get back on your bike again. Get us a contract!'

As we know, Decca had been the biggest company, but he took the tapes from Decca and he hawked them round London, all the record companies, and he wasn't getting anywhere. They weren't biting, until someone heard them and, to cut a long story short because it is well chronicled, got them to George Martin, and as a result we got a test recording date, which was set for 6 June 1962, just after we had come back from Hamburg for the third time. We opened the Star Club, and because Bert released us from our Polydor contract and we could now say we were EMI recording stars, which was a big company in England. By now, Brian had got us onto the BBC radio – *Teenagers Turn* at the Manchester Playhouse – and we were broadcasting stars as well.

When we recorded, we were adamant about the fact that we wanted to record our own material. *Love Me Do* and *P.S. I Love You,* for example. We'd tried them out on the German crowds at the Star Club. We changed the arrangements several times, until we were quite happy with them. Even though George Martin wanted us to record other people's material, we were adamant. We write our own material and we want to record it. We were quite dogmatic about it, actually. If it was anyone else's material we wouldn't pay too much attention to it. We would do a back-handed version of it to make sure that our material was stronger. Hence, *Love Me Do* and *P.S. I Love You*, they were the first ones we wanted to record.

Q How did the recording session go?

There were problems, actually. I mean, okay, we were a little bit blasé, I'll be quite honest. When you look back, we were the Beatles and we thought we were the biggest thing since sliced bread, even though we weren't, but we're from Liverpool and we had that Liverpool arrogance.

When we got to EMI at Abbey Road, we went into Studio Two and we just set up like we normally do, a couple of sound boards up and all the other bits and pieces. The sound engineers were miles away at the bottom end of the studio. We played around with the sound for a while. I suppose our equipment, our amplifiers, weren't as good as they could have been, so there were a few problems with amplification, but we played the numbers and we were quite happy with the way they had gone. At the end of the day, it wasn't supposed to be a final cut. This was just to let people know because they hadn't heard us before, but as we know now, after that particular session words were spoken. My drumming wasn't good enough, or alleged to be not good enough. They wanted to use a session drummer, and a short while after that I got the order of the golden boot.

Q But it was commonplace to replace band members with session musicians for recording in those days?

It was common knowledge to anyone involved in the record industry that for certain sessions, studio musicians sat in and they played it. They knew what was required. They could read music, and all the rest of it.

Q So what happened next?

George Martin or someone said that they weren't happy with the sound they were getting with my drumming, and that it needed to be played around with a little bit more. Looking at it from a purely economic angle, they thought that they should bring in a session drummer, who was Andy White, and get the session over and done with.

What they were saying is that what happens outside of the studio is nothing to do with us. There's no need to change the format or the line-up. In fact, we got back in touch with George Martin after the dismissal, just to try to resolve this puzzle, because we weren't

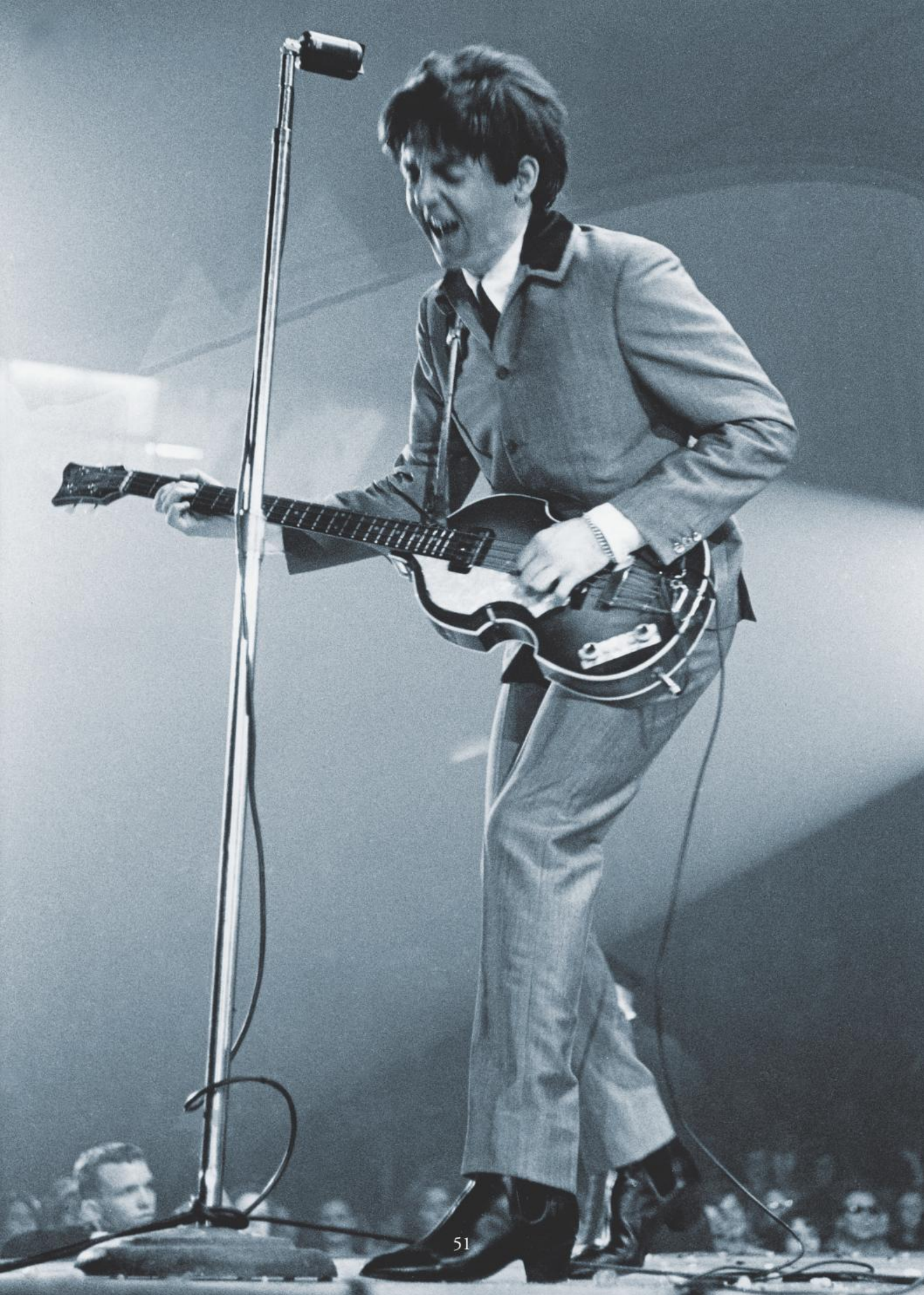
getting any answers. There was all these adverse things being said, but Brian wouldn't give me a definitive reason. He was quite tight-lipped about it. He just said the boys want you out and that was that. So we decided to try and get it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

So what happened was we phoned George Martin, and he explained to us – well my mother, Mona, actually – that what he said could have been misconstrued, that what he meant was, fine, we could use a session drummer in the studio, but that he appreciated the charisma of Pete and the qualities he brings to the band, and that what happens in the studio and what happens on stage are totally different.

Whether that got misconstrued, I'll never know, but it was the perfect excuse to get rid of me. We can say that George Martin wants to use a session drummer. Of course, the same thing happened to Ringo initially. Ringo jumps into the hot seat, God bless him, and off he goes, off to London. He sets his gear up and who's there? Andy White. Of course, Andy played on *P.S. I Love You* and *Love Me Do*, and on *Please Please Me*, I think – a couple of takes on that, until eventually some said that enough was enough, and that Ringo was staying on sessions, and thanks, Andy, away you go. So, whether the same thing would have happened to me or not – well, it's academic now, isn't it?

Q In your opinion, is there much difference in the drumming when you listen to the two versions?

Yeah, there is. I mean, you can tell Andy White's version and Ringo's version of *Love Me Do*. Ringo's is a little bit heavier. My drumming on it was totally different. I think the unfair thing comparing my version with Andy White's and Ringo's is that mine was never supposed to be the final thing; mine was for the purpose of letting George Martin and the sound engineers know what the song was about, to let them think about it. So when I listen to it,



I don't hear a finished recording, I hear a glorified demo, so that's one way of looking at it.

The song changed an awful lot when Andy took over with George Martin's arrangement. It was very different compared to the way that we as the Beatles performed *Love Me Do* to the audiences. There was a change of beat in the middle, and it was slower. The change of beat was put in because that was fascinating to the audiences. But, you know, for people to compare my recording with Andy's and Ringo's recordings – you know, they make an unfair judgment on it. I'll be quite open about it. Some people have listened to it and said it would have been better if it had stayed the way we first did it. Other people have said they prefer Andy's version. I suppose that's individual choice. All I am pointing out is that mine wasn't a finished version, it was a glorified demo. Base your understanding or your opinion on that.

Q How were you sacked, Pete, and how on earth did you feel?
Very quickly, actually. We had played the Cavern the night before and Brian asked if he could see me in the morning. I thought, 'Okay, it's another chew the fat one, talk about promoters – shall we put the price up, what's this venue like?' – the usual business stuff that we talked about all the time. I said, 'Okay, I'll be there about half ten,' or something.

And he said, 'Yeah, that's fine.'

I jumped in the van with Neil and came home. Neil dropped me off the next morning at NEMS and said he'd wait for me. I said, 'Yeah, I'll only be a few minutes.'

I went into Brian's office and I could tell that he was very aggravated and anxious. We talked round the subject for a while, and then he said, 'Pete, I don't really know to tell you this, but the boys want you out.' He said, 'It's already been arranged,' and I think that was the key phrase.

It had already been arranged that Ringo would join the band on Saturday, and this was either Wednesday or Thursday. It was a bombshell, you know. I walked in cock-a-hoop, not expecting anything bad because there had been no forewarning or indication that they weren't happy with me in the band or anything like that.

When I was confronted with it, to be quite honest my brain scrambled and I was standing there gasping for air, trying to get my brain to work. I said, 'Well, what's the reason for it?'

The reason that was given was that I wasn't a good enough drummer. They felt Ringo was better, and I've always disputed that. A lot of people who have seen me play then and since have all said it's a matter of personal choice, but at that time I was reputed to be one of the best drummers in the world, so that 'not good enough' thing didn't hold water. It didn't make sense, but at that moment nothing made sense.

I thought, 'Okay, if that's the way they want it, I'm off.' They even asked me to play two gigs with them until Ringo joined! I suppose I was brain-dead, because I agreed to do it, and it was only when I got back home again I thought, 'Hold on a minute – I can't play two gigs with the guys who've just kicked me out.' But Brian even had covered himself on that, because he had Johnny Hutch playing on the same bill, and so when I didn't show up Johnny Hutch stood in for me.

When I walked out of Brian's office Neil was in the van and he saw my face and asked what had happened. I told him I'd been kicked out, and he said he didn't believe it. We didn't say anything until I got back home again, and that's when it all really hit me. So that was it. That was the way I was dismissed, right there.

Q People have put all sorts of reasons forward for it. What do you reckon, Pete? Will you ever know?

To be quite honest, what was put forward as the reason then – my drumming ability – never made sense. Never did and never

THE BEATLES

Rickenbacker

will. Then you had other people who say it was because I didn't have my hair cut. Well, no one told me there was going to be a Beatle hairstyle. If they had asked me to comb it down, I would have combed it down. In fact, to prove a point when I went over to America for six months with the Pete Best Combo, I combed my hair down just to say, there, that dispels the hair-dress myth. Then there was jealousy because of the fans' reaction to me; I was becoming too popular. I was antisocial and I wouldn't talk. Some said that Brian felt threatened because I had managed the business side of things before.

It could have been because Brian had – what's the word for it – had approached me, and I had refused. You know, he propositioned me and I said, 'No, I'm not that type of guy.' So a lot of people have said maybe it was because I refused Brian, but that doesn't really add up. I think that now there's possibly only two or there people who know the real reason why I was dismissed. Whether it will ever come out or not, I don't know. There have been so many things said.

The Beatles Anthology shocked me in a way, I suppose, when I was watching it, when George insinuated I was becoming unpunctual and I wasn't turning up for gigs. Hang on a minute! Let's clear up that one. In the two years that I played with them I played over 1,000 gigs and I only missed four, so if that's unreliability, or whatever the word is, then, as they say in America, I'll plead the Fifth.

Q And looking back, there was no inkling that you weren't liked or that you no longer fitted in?

No. You couldn't even say there were group arguments. There had been discussions, but it was all on a musical level. What we had was – think about it – a band which was totally different from anything else because of what we'd experienced together. It had spent its time in Germany, where we'd had to live hand to mouth, in one another's pockets 24 hours a day to survive.

When we came back Liverpool we spent more time together. We did gigs. We were playing dinner-time sessions. We were playing evening sessions. We were playing night sessions. We were in one another's company an awful long time, and if there was anything about me that was irksome or annoying, how come it took two years to come out? So it's one of those where you have to make up your own mind about it, I guess.

Q Did you see the banners or hear the chants from the fans saying 'Pete forever'?

No, I wasn't there. When that reaction took place in Mathew Street, I wasn't there. I went along after all that. I did go down when Granada Television was recording at the Cavern, just to see what was going on. You know, a television company recording at the Cavern? But I couldn't take it, to be quite honest. When I went

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Ex-Beatle Pete Best recalls his firing from the band.

down there were too many people asking me what happened, and all that. They were lovely thoughts, don't get me wrong. They were on my side, but in that predicament and in that situation, I realised that wasn't the place for me.

But I heard about the reaction and the banners and the protests in Matthew Street; they were fed back through the public and through the media. There were people knocking at my door to ask me if I knew what was happening. It was very heart-warming. I'll be quite honest, I knew deep down inside nothing was going to change things, but it was a very heart-warming reaction from the fans in Liverpool, and I thank them for it.

Q Who were the Hurricanes and why didn't you join them when they asked?

Rory Storm and the Hurricanes was a top Liverpool group and Ringo Star was the drummer for them before he left to join the Beatles. Just in case you didn't know. At one time Rory and the Hurricanes were top dogs in Liverpool. Rory was a prolific young man, absolutely fantastic. When the Beatles came into vogue, a lot of people changed. Rory changed to a certain extent, but not as convincingly as the others, and his credibility lessened.

People might think I'm talking rubbish now, but it would have been easy for me to jump in and play for him. But I was looking beyond that, actually. My head was up my backside, anyway, because of what had gone on, and by the time I had straightened myself out, offers of work had started to come in, so Rory was quite low in the pecking order. I know it was a cry from the heart to join him; you know, to get them out of a predicament because they hadn't got a drummer, but I had my sights set elsewhere. As it so happened, after a lot and lot of people coming up and making me offers, proposals to join bands and all the other bits and pieces, I finally went with an up-and-coming band called Lee Curtis and the All Stars, which I had heard very good things about.

Q Why haven't you dished the dirt on the Beatles? It must have been very tempting.

Well, if I'd done that – and I'm not saying there is any dirt to dish – the first thing people are going to say is, 'What the hell's he crying about? It's all sour grapes. How come he didn't say that before? How come it's taken him this long?'

And anyway, I've gone past that. I switched off from thinking about the whys, the wherefores, what-ifs, hows, could-have-beens, and maybes. I moved on from all that years ago.

I stopped looking back because there is more to life; it's about today and tomorrow and what's going to happen in the future, rather than worrying about what happened 40-odd years ago. I think once I'd got that out of my system, I was fine. You are always going to get people come up and say, ah, you know something you haven't talked about. Well, maybe I have. Because there are bound to be a few secrets people keep, isn't there?

Q Did any of them ever try and contact you after you were out of the band?

No. No contact from them at all. The only contact after the dismissal from the band was from Brian Epstein, actually. He got in touch with me one day and he said, 'Pete I would like to see you in the office' – the old expression! I remember thinking there was a glimmer of light, perhaps some changing ideas. So, I went down there and it was all very relaxed this time because the deed had been done. He'd done the dirty work for the others. They weren't in the office. He was just the axe man, for want of a better word or better expression.

He said he realised what I was going through, or had gone through, and that he was interested in signing a young group called the Merseybeats, which was a very, very young band. A great little band, actually, which had modelled itself on the Beatles at that particular stage. So he said he'd like me to join them and

build them into a second Beatles; be just like you used to be and all that.

It was a wonderful thought, you know, that he had confidence in me, but hold on, Brian. I'm going to be in the same stable, right? You are asking me to build another band and to make it into a second Beatles, right? So if I'm not good enough for that band and to stay in that stable, how can I do this? I said, 'No, I'll stay where I am; sink or swim, I'll stay with the band,' and he said fine, and that it was one of those things.

As it happens, he never signed the Merseybeats, and I wouldn't like to think it was because of me, because the Merseybeats went on to become a terrific band, top recording stars, and they still are a top band. They're still touring with my great friends Billy Kinsey and Tony Green, but as Brian said, it was one of those things.

That was the only approach. After that, trying to get in touch with the Beatles or expecting the Beatles to get in touch with me – John, George, Paul, or Ringo – forget about it. No.

Q Which are your favourite songs from that very early period?
Oh, I'm a rocker! *I Saw Her Standing There*. That to me was a little bit like the Beatles that I knew; there's a little bit of venom in it, a bit of real energy. So, that's always remained one of my favourites. I still take great pleasure in playing it on stage with my own band, as well.

Q When you think of your time with the Beatles now, what comes to mind?
I think of as a two-year period which was full of adventure. There was sadness too, because there was death, with Stu's brain haemorrhage. But that aside, it was always fun. We were doing things. We were crossing boundaries and doing things that other bands weren't doing and it was always exciting. You looked forward to each and every day. Let's wake up and let's get on with life! That was it. That was why the time passed so fast. It was so exciting,

with so many things going on in so many different directions. It was great to be part of.

Q Did you get on with any one of them in particular?
Always John. It was John right from the word go, from way back in 1959 down at the Casbah. I was friends with all of them, don't get me wrong. A lot of people say, 'You were friends with John, so you weren't friends with the others.' Let's get that straight. No. We were all mates, mostly. I was closest to John simply because of the type of guy he was. I spent a lot of time in Germany with him. Even in Liverpool, you know, we'd spend time here. He'd spend the night here. I'd go to Aunt Mimi's with him. We were social buddies. We played on stage and we played off stage as well.

Q So Pete, what are you doing at the moment, and what are your set lists when you go out on stage?
I've got a great band, my own band, the Pete Best Band, which is only now getting the acclaim that it so richly deserves. There are five guys in the band including myself, and it's not Pete Best and the Band, it's the Pete Best Band. They all contribute and they are all great musicians.

The stage show we do, which travels the world at the present moment, is called Best of the Beatles. Even though we are recording original material, which will be out at the end of the year, the stage show we are doing at the present moment is music that I was associated with in the fifties, sixties. There are some standards and some Beatle numbers which we enjoy playing, but it's a very big-sounding band. Double drums! All from Liverpool. My younger brother Roag plays alongside me. Roag and myself on drums, Phil Mealia on lead guitar, Paul Parry on bass guitar, and Tony Flynn on rhythm guitar. Everyone sings and there are some great harmonies. It's a very big sound. And we have fun. There is an hour and a half of pure mayhem on stage, but the kids love it and we enjoy it as well.

Q Do you think the Casbah has been overshadowed slightly by the Cavern club? It's absolutely integral to the Beatles' story.
It is. That's why the Casbah has attained National Heritage status. Last year it was nominated by the West Derby Historical Society and the National Heritage awarded it the badge, which was great for the Casbah, and they said there's there nothing else like it in Liverpool. We feel it has been overshadowed by the Cavern, but we are fighting tooth and nail to put that right. I think the longer the Casbah is here and the longer we talk about it and the more that people visit it, the stronger it'll become. Now it's on the tourist trail, with Heritage status, people are flocking in to see it. They realise it is a piece of history, and we are very proud of it, and I think sometime in the future it will stand alongside of the Cavern, if not taller. That is our challenge.

Q You've got original art work here as well, haven't you?
We have, which no one else has got. We have got the Rainbow ceiling, painted by Paul McCartney, and John's famous Aztec ceiling. The Spider's Web at the back, which I painted. If you go to the coffee bar room you've got the Stars on the ceiling, which were painted by John, George, Paul, Ken Brown, and myself. You've got John's mural over the old fireplace, which was commissioned by Mona for Cynthia, Cynthia Lennon. She painted that there. There's John in his Elvis Presley pose. So there's history here. We have even got the initials where John carved his name on the plank after he gunged up the ceiling, so to speak.

When the Lord Mayor opened it, when he presented the plaque and his is going back a few years, I think he summed it up well. He said this is our tomb of Tutankhamen. We looked at one another and we thought, yeah, that's what it is. People who don't know walk in and it's full of priceless stuff.

Allan Williams

Like Pete Best, Allan Williams had one of those moments that changed the course of his life forever. That moment also came in 1962, and it, too, by coincidence, involved Brian Epstein. Epstein had visited the Blue Angel Club, sought out Williams, and told him that he was considering taking on the management of the Beatles. What, asked Epstein, was Williams' honest opinion of them?

'My honest opinion, Brian, is don't touch them with a bargepole.' Epstein ignored the advice, of course, and during that meeting Williams relinquished whatever call he had on the group. The phrase has haunted him for 45 years, for in the light of their subsequent huge success it seemed to him tantamount to giving away a small fortune. Perhaps it was. We'll never know if the Beatles would have been anywhere near as big had Epstein not employed his considerable presentational skills and boundless energy to take them to the top, although the answer must be probably not. In Williams's mind, though, he'd let the Beatles slip through his fingers and kissed goodbye to millions.

There are those who cast doubt on Allan Williams's claim to be the Beatles' first manager. Bill Harry, for instance, the founder of the legendary *Mersey Beat* newspaper, has said so in his exhaustive and excellent *Beatles Encyclopaedia*. He believes that Williams was more a booking agent than a manager. That may have been the case, but surely we long ago reached the point where it doesn't really matter anymore. Most of the Beatle history books recognise Williams as their first manager, and anyway, the whole story is the richer for his presence.

Whatever he called himself at the time or has called himself since, there can be little argument that Allan Williams played a key role in the development of the early Beatles. That their powerhouse sound was honed and crafted in the sweaty clubs of Hamburg, and that they would never have gone there at all had it not been for Williams is enough for him to claim a special place in Beatles history, but he'd known them before that when they'd hardly been a band at all. The Jacaranda and the Blue Angel are almost as important in the story as the Cavern, and they were Allan Williams's clubs.

It seems that much of Allan Williams's time since those heady days of the early sixties has been taken up with trying to salvage something from what he sees as his biggest mistake. He's written a book about his experiences. He was involved with *Live! at the Star-Club in Hamburg, Germany; 1962*, an album which captured their Hamburg act on record, albeit with awful sound quality. He attends Beatles Conventions and gives interviews. In many ways, the Beatles have been and remain the backdrop to his life.

Q Allan Williams – identify yourself!

I was the Beatles' first-ever manager, before Brian Epstein took them over. I was known as the first manager in their formative days because I think everybody knows the story of the Beatles when they became famous, but not so much is known about

the formative years of the Beatles. They were the most exciting days, the ones in Hamburg, the ones working in Liverpool before they became famous. This was before the Cavern even had them working. It was a lot of fun in those days.

Obviously, we didn't know we were creating history then, we just went with the flow. I would say the most creative years of the sixties coincided with the arrival of the Beatles.

Q Where did you first meet them?

Well, I didn't even know they were a group. I had a coffee-bar club downtown in Slater Street named the Jacaranda. I remember having a problem with the ladies' toilets next door, because we shared it with a shop next door which sold candy, and the ladies had to share our toilets. Because of the obscene graffiti that the girls used to scrawl on the wall about the private parts of the Beatles and some of the other groups, I had to get the toilets redecorated.

In those days, two guys that used to hang around as coffee bar layabouts were John Lennon and Stuart Sutcliffe, and knowing they were from the art school, I said, 'I've got a job for you lads. Will you decorate the ladies' toilets?' And they agreed. So, the first money that every changed hands between me and the Beatles was for decorating the ladies' toilets. Actually, when they finished I preferred the graffiti.

In those days they used to hang about as coffee-bar layabouts. I can still see them now; Paul and John having toast and John wanting jam on the toast and Paul telling him off: 'John, you must be mad! It's a penny extra.' Now look at Paul, worried about a penny extra for the jam on the toast. I wish he would pay some of the jam he owed me.

Q How did you get involved with them as a group?

Well, what happened was that I put on a big pop concert in what

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THE
BEATLES

was then the boxing stadium; it's now demolished. I had seen a show with Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent at the Empire Theatre and I booked the entire show, but unfortunately, Eddie Cochran was killed in that tragic accident two weeks before the concert. I said, 'The bloody bastard; he's let me down here badly.' So I phoned up Larry Parnes, who was handling them both, and I asked if the show was cancelled. He said, 'Well, you can cancel it, of course, but Gene Vincent is still willing to do it.' I said, 'Okay, we'll go ahead.' So then my problem was, how can I make up for the loss of Eddie Cochran?

Then I got this brainwave. There were so many groups that used to hang out at the Jacaranda, I thought, 'I'll put them on for the first part of the show; Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Gerry and the Pacemakers,' and so I put the show on with Liverpool groups, which was a big success.

Then when we went back to the Jacaranda after the show, and Parnes was so impressed with my groups – well, they weren't my groups, I just booked them for the show – he said, 'Can I use them to back my artists on a tour of Scotland?' He meant Tommy Steel, or someone like that.

I said, 'Yes, sure.'

So, next day I go to the Jacaranda and I was approached, I think by Stuart and John, because they were at the art school, which was about three minutes away from the club. They used to skip lessons sometimes and come to the Jac to listen to the groups rehearse, because the basement wasn't used in the daytime, so I let the groups rehearse. I think it was Stu who came up to me and said, 'Aye, Al, when are you going to do something for us like?'

And I thought, 'There's no more decorating to be done, that's it.'

He said, 'No, we've got a group and we were at your show last night. Would you like to manage us?'

And I said, 'Well, who are you?'

And he said, 'The Beatles.'

I said, 'That's a strange name,' and I called somebody over from the Big Three, which was quite a big group then, and I asked if they could help these lads out.

Cas from the Big Three said, 'What do you call yourselves?' I think it was that John said it was the Beatles. 'Oh, right,' says Cas. 'You'll never get anywhere with a stupid name like that.'

It was all Johnny Hurricane and so and so. It was always a name and then the name of the group afterwards. So he said, 'What's your name?', and he said John. Cas said, 'How about Long John Silver? And how about calling yourselves the Silver Beatles?'

They all cringed, but for the first few gigs they went out as the Silver Beatles. I've still got contracts with the Silver Beatles on. So I became their manager. Actually, I was flattered, really, because no other group had ever asked me to be a manager and I'd never been a manager of a pop group, so I was excited and looked forward to the fun of it. From there we did all the local halls, mainly the Grove and the Ballroom, which has got a plaque outside, saying the Beatles played there 18 times, or whatever it was.

Q How did the opportunity arise for them to work in Hamburg?

Then the Hamburg scene came up. I had a group playing in Hamburg, and they said, 'Alan get your ass over. There is so much work here, if you bring a tape of some of the groups over, you'll get plenty of work.' So off I went to Hamburg. I went all round the clubs and ended up in the Grosse Freiheit off the Reeperbahn. I heard this rock and roll music coming from a basement club called the Kaiserkeller, so I went down there and there was this awful German band trying impersonate rock and roll. They were going, (sings) 'tutti fruiti, oh tutti fruiti,' and it was terrible, with no feeling whatsoever, and all the kids were bored. Then, when they put the record on in the interval, and everybody got up and danced! I thought, 'This is it,' so I asked to see the owner and he

turned out to be a man called Bruno Koschmider. I sold him the idea of having Liverpool groups over to play. I had the tape and he brought out a lovely Grundig reel-to-reel tape player. We put the tape on, turned around, and I was waiting to hear this rock and roll, and what I heard was – nothing. Somebody had taped over it – completely cocked it up, so I thought, 'How do I get out of this?'

I said, 'Well, I'm sorry, but the groups are very good and here is my address. If you ever come to Liverpool ask for me and you can see the groups or I'll send you another tape.' So I came back to Liverpool and told the group that somebody had cocked up the tape and that because of that we had lost the job.

Then for some reason I had to go to London. Oh, I remember the reason. I had another group called Derry and the Seniors, which incidentally had Howie Casey on saxophone as a member, and he finished up in the horn section for Wings. I had a minibus in those days and I said to the Seniors, look, let's go down to London, aim for the Two I's Coffee Bar in Soho, which was famous at the time, do an audition there, and let's see if we can pick up some work. So, off we went to London. I asked the owner of the Two I's if we could we play for nothing, and he said we could, naturally!

So the boys were on stage playing away and then this young lad came over to me and asked if I was the manager of the group. I said yes, and he said, 'Well there's this German geezer here who would like to meet you. He thinks he knows you.' And of course who should it be but Herr Koschmider. It was a complete chance in a million. Instead of coming to Liverpool he went to London asking for the Beatles. Of course, in London nobody had even heard of Liverpool, let alone the groups, so I got him out of the Two I's pretty quick and did a deal with him, so the next group that went to Hamburg was Derry and the Seniors. They did so well that Koschmider wanted to put another band on at a place called the Indra, which had been a strip club. So he kicked out the strippers.

By this time I thought the Beatles were good enough to go over. In those days they were that broke that they hadn't the fare to go over, and as I loved Hamburg, it was a good excuse for me to get to Hamburg on the Reeperbahn again, and so I drove them there and they worked there for three months. They went in August and they were supposed to come back after three months, but because they were such an attraction there, that was extended to December, so they were there for five months.

Q Weren't the lads deported from Germany at the end of that first trip?

Yes. In Hamburg they'd progressed to playing in the Kaiserkellar, but there was another club around the corner called the Top Ten. Now, in the Top Ten there was a fantastic musician playing called Tony Sheridan. In their intervals they used to go round

Click the above photo for a video link

Ex-Beatles manager Allan Williams remembers the Beatles in Hamburg.

to the Top Ten to listen to him. In fact, they owe a lot to Tony Sheridan – they learnt a great deal him. Now, Koschmider had a bit of a spy called Steiner, and he reported to Koschmider that the lads had done a secret deal, the deal being that when they came back to Hamburg they were going to play at the Top Ten club. So, Koschmider invented a story that they tried to set fire to their living quarters, which were at the back of an old cinema. This filthy place was obviously an old variety theatre at one time, and this was their living accommodation and their dressing room. They had no running water whatsoever. I don't think it had been cleaned for about 20 years.

Anyway, they were getting ready to go home and they were mucking about. I think it was Paul who set light to a condom, which scorched the wall because the dust was about half an inch thick. It just left a black mark on the wall, but Koschmider reported them to the police. When the police came round they found none of them had work permits, which Koschmider promised to get them but didn't. Now, they had a curfew in Hamburg; anybody under the age of 18 had to leave the area by a certain time because it was a red-light district, so the police went round looking for IDs and they found out that George Harrison was only 17, and he was playing till three or four o'clock in the morning, so Paul and Pete were charged with arson and George was underage, so they were deported. It was as simple as that.

It was harder to get them back the second time because of that. This time, instead of being smuggled in as students, they went in as musicians. I had to sign an affidavit to say that I would be responsible for any misbehaviour by the group. Also, the guy at the Top Ten, Peter Eckhorn, he had to sign a similar thing. So, in short, Eckhorn and I would be responsible for any of their mistakes!

Q Were you still in Hamburg when they came back to Liverpool?

No, I had the Jacaranda Coffee Bar club, as I've said, and the law changed, which meant I could also open a licensed club. I had these premises only about four minutes from the Jac, which I named the Blue Angel, after the film, the German film with Marlene Dietrich. So I opened the Blue Angel, and I was so busy with opening that that I really had no time for them. And, to be honest, I never thought for one moment that they would be bigger than Elvis or whatever, because, you know, it would have been fuck the blue Angel if there was more money with the Beatles, but I wasn't to know that, of course.

By then I had also opened a club called the Top Ten club. I was going to have one group in Germany, then they would come back to Liverpool and work my Top Ten, but unfortunately the Top Ten club burnt down after being open for just five days. That's when the Beatles were due back home and I was in shit street because I had no club for them to play in.

So I asked a character called Bob Wooler, whose name is now famous in the Beatles story because he eventually became the DJ of the Cavern Club, 'Will you look after this band? They are very, very good. Can you get them some gigs?'

Bob got them a gig at a place called Litherland Town Hall on 27 December, 1960 for a fee of £6, and the moment they went on stage all the bouncers thought there was a fight, because all the girls went screaming to the stage. You have never seen anything as electrifying as those Beatles as they exploded into action. The promoter, I forget his name [Brian Kelly], he put the bouncers on the door to stop other promoters getting to the band because he wanted to book them. And that's how Beatlemania in Liverpool first hit the town.

Q Everybody seems to a different date for the start of Beatlemania!

Well, you take your pick. That's my story.

YOU MAY TELEPHONE
FROM HERE

Q Can I ask how important Bill Harry and the *Mersey Beat* newspaper was to the local music scene at that time, in your opinion?

Well, Bill Harry was a student in the local art college, and I think he was older than the Beatles. He was in a class above them. He used to hang out at the Jacaranda, he and his lady friend, whom he eventually married. He was a bit of a writer, and he had this good idea, and he created a magazine called *Mersey Beat*, which basically listed all the venues where the groups were playing. It wasn't a very good magazine; in fact, it went bust because only the groups were buying it and they only bought it to find out where the hell they were supposed to be playing. I had stacks of the things and he'd come and we'd only sold about two. The general public wasn't interested, so he folded up. At one stage he tried to sell it to me, and of course I knew the sales were not very good, so I turned it down. Then he asked Brian Epstein, and I think Brian Epstein did take it over for a while, but I think only to kill it, so really *Mersey Beat* had a short life and it just faded away.

Q Speaking of Brian Epstein, when did he come on the scene?

I was still struggling when Brian Epstein showed up. He was a sort of bored, failed amateur actor, and he was looking for something like the Beatles. He came round and said he was thinking of managing them, and he asked because he knew my association with them, and my reply to him was, if I may swear, 'Don't touch them with a fucking barge poll,' but obviously he didn't listen take my advice, thank God.

Q Why did you tell Brian not to touch them?

Because they welshed on an agreement. They refused to pay me the commission they owed me – a whole fifteen quid a week! – for one of their engagements at the Top Ten Club in Hamburg and I was very annoyed about it. I thought that if they could do that

to me after all I'd done for them they could do it to anyone and I thought Brian should know about it. Luckily he didn't let my problems with them put him off.

He did a great job with them. I've never knocked Brian. I remember watching when they first did *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, and I thought, 'Jesus Christ, what have I done?' I just picked a cushion up and threw it at the television; believe me, if it had have been a brick it would have gone through that bloody thing. But now I have a sense of pride. I am very proud that I am associated with the formative years of such a group. How many people would like to be in my position? To say, yeah, I was there in the creative years. A lot of people say, but you could have been a millionaire, for Christ's sake. I say I am – I'm a millionaire of memories. A millionaire couldn't have had the fun and excitement that was around in those days.

Q Apart from the music, what was it that set them apart?

What was different? Well they were all quite intelligent, and they had this terrific sense of humour. I think the humour was an integral part of their act, because they did automatically. They were fantastic on stage. Absolutely.

One of my proudest moments was when they were playing before the Queen at the Royal Command Performance and John made that quip: 'Those of you in the cheap seats clap your hands – the rest of you rattle your jewellery.' That was typical of them. It was so natural.

Q Can I ask your opinion on a couple of things? Why do you think they gave Pete Best the push?

The great unanswered question! There are so many stories, you just have to take your pick. A lot of people reckon it was because of their jealousy of Pete's good looks, and I tend to go along with that one, really, because believe me he was as good a drummer as

Ringo, if not better. He put the beat into the music of Liverpool. That was Pete Best.

Q Tell me about Mona Best.

Well she was running the Casbah Coffee Bar here, where we are doing this interview now, and I think she was very influential during the period of the coffee bar days. She would look after them, because, don't forget, her boy was playing in a group, so she had more than a passing interest, and she looked after their interests. You couldn't pull the wool over Ma Best's eyes. I was terrified of her. I remember pulling up with a coach full of tourists here and they said, 'Are you coming in?' She was still alive then, and I said, 'I'm not going in there!'

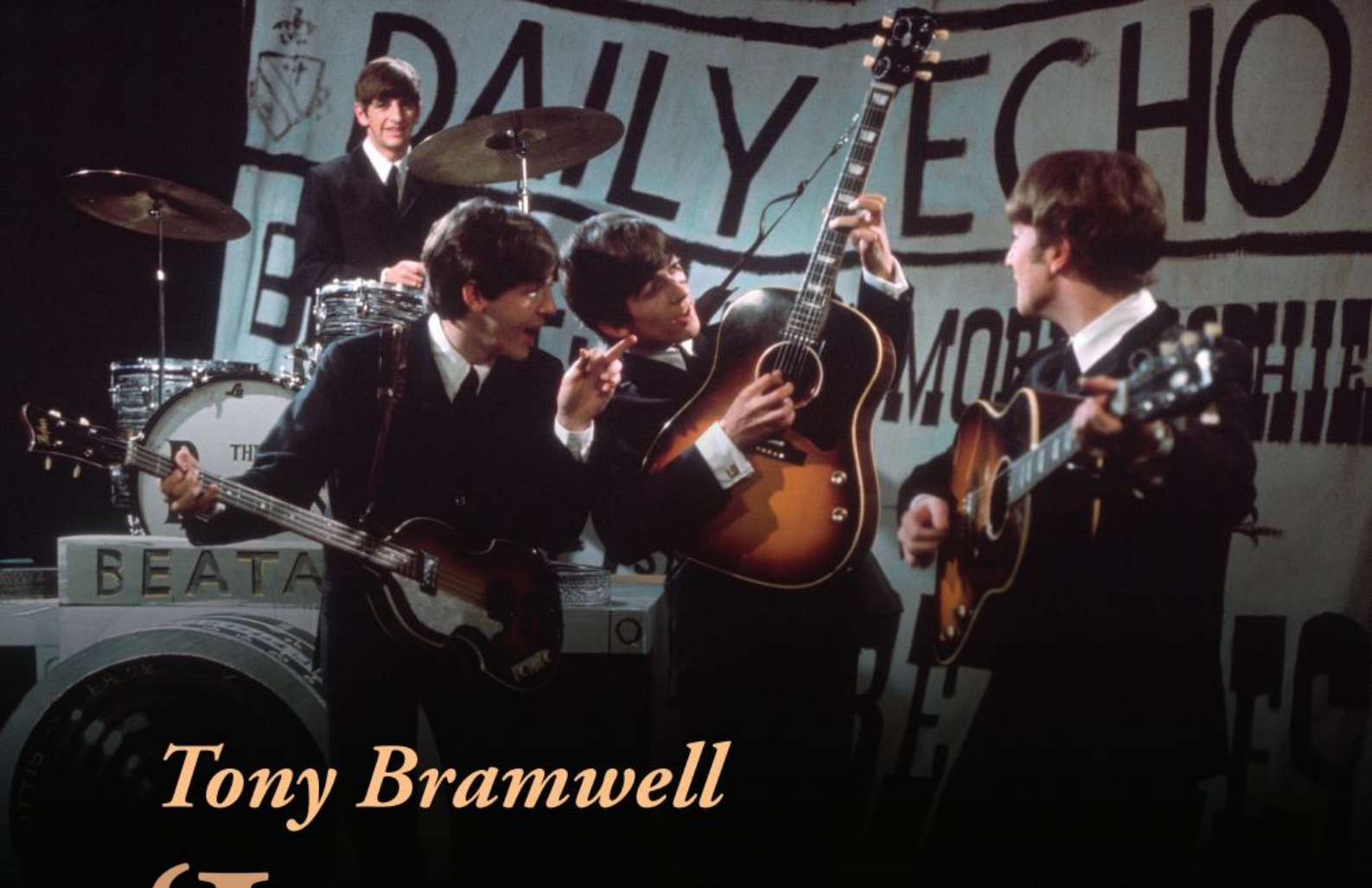
But she was a charming lady, basically – very tough, but fair. And don't forget, all the work had been done by me and Mona. They were a ready-made product when Brian took them over. They were already the rage of Liverpool. All they needed was a rich manager, and of course they got him.

Q What do you think of now when you think of the Beatles?

I think it has to be the Hamburg days, because that's where they learnt their craft. A lot of people say, 'Oh the Cavern Club, the home of the Beatles.' The Cavern didn't want to know them at first. It was in Hamburg that they learnt their trade, so that when they came back and played that Litherland Town Hall gig, and the girls thought they were a German band, that's when suddenly they became professionals. Thanks to Hamburg, Beatlemania exploded.

Q When was the last time that you saw them as a group?

I don't think they ever did a bad show. I think it would have to be the Cavern. I went down to see them and the sweat was rolling of the walls. They were very exciting years.



Tony Bramwell

'If you want to know anything about the Beatles, ask Tony Bramwell. He remembers more than I do.'

That quote from Paul McCartney adorned the cover of Bramwell's highly readable recent book, *Magical Mystery Tours*, and it's not difficult to believe that Sir Paul is right, for Tony Bramwell was part of the Beatle circus from the very beginning right through to the bitter end. A childhood friend of George Harrison, Bramwell too was bitten by the music bug, as so many Liverpool kids during the late fifties and early sixties were. Intrigued by the posters for a show which read 'The Beatles – Direct from Hamburg', he tripped along on the bus to see what the fuss was about. Harrison was travelling with his guitar on the same bus, and Bramwell was astonished to discover that he was one of the Beatles.

From that chance meeting, Tony Bramwell began to roadie for the band, which set him on an incredible personal and professional journey about which you'll read in the pages that follow.

After the Beatles split ended his professional association with the band, Bramwell went on to enjoy a successful career as

Britain's first independent record promoter, working with such artists as Bruce Springsteen, the Beach Boys, Eric Clapton, and Cher. He became involved in the world of movie music and formed his own record label, and he dated a string of delightful young ladies, including the glamorous actress Julie Ege, with whom he lived.

It was all a far cry from carrying George Harrison's guitar to gigs in Liverpool.

Q To help set the scene, Tony, can you describe the Liverpool in which you and the Beatles grew up?

It was post-war Liverpool, so there was a lot of bomb damage in the middle of the city, but where we all lived, in the leafy suburbs, as they're often described, the buildings were mainly intact. The industrial estates around by the airport were beginning to spring up. There was a Dunlop factory, a British Drug Houses pharmaceutical factory, the Meccano factory, and the Dinky Toy factory all nearby.

We basically had this sort of Swallows and Amazons sort of childhood, just happy kids running round. We had farmland and the river Mersey all around us and Liverpool airport and a couple of stately homes – places where you could be really stupid and be Robin Hood and cowboys and Indians, and ride your bikes wherever you went. You could ride along the Mersey shore. We didn't actually come from the inner city. I suppose we had a very middle-class upbringing.

I had a brilliant childhood, and George, who was one of my best friends, and I used to meet up every weekend and we would go on cycle trips over to Chester with bottles of lemonade – all that sort of silly Famous Five life with oodles and oodles of lemonade. It was a pretty nice place to grow up. We had three golf courses very nearby so we could go foraging for golf balls, so we got some pocket money out of that as well. It was good fun.

Q Do you remember how the Merseybeat scene evolved?

Well, the Merseybeat scene started off as a skiffle and jazz thing. The biggest act when I was young was the Mersysippie Jazz Band. They'd do their own version of whatever Chris Barber, Kenny Ball, and Acker Bilk were doing. The skiffle groups were groups like the Blue Jeans and a group who was a fronted by a midget called Nicky Coffee. He used to stand on his tea chest bass when he played! He lived across the road and round the corner from me. They won some TV talent show and did a couple of big TV shows. John had his Quarrymen as a skiffle group, but they didn't have the showbiz requirement that the Blue Jeans and the others had.

The first sort of rock groups were Gerry Marsden and the Mars Bars, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, and the Remo Four. Rory Storm and the Hurricanes were a showband; the Remo Four were more instrumental and did covers of tunes by the Shadows and the Ventures. Gerry Marsden and the Mars Bars – they later became the Pacemakers, of course – did a mixture of the current pop songs and some country songs. Gerry became a friend of mine because his girlfriend lived round the corner. They were probably the most popular group in Liverpool in 1960. I used to meet up with him and carry his guitar into the ballrooms in order to get in for free. It only cost half a crown or five shillings to get into these places. I used to meet up with Gerry two or three times a week and just toddle in with his guitar.

Gerry and the Pacemakers went to Hamburg for a season, and playing at Litherland Town Hall was a new group. They were billed as being from Hamburg, so I thought I'd go and see them. I thought they'd be a German group sent on exchange, which happened in those days. I was on the bus and George Harrison was on the bus with his guitar. I hadn't seen George for about two years. I asked him where he was going and he replied that he was going to Litherland Town Hall, as his band was playing there

tonight. So I asked if I could carry his guitar in and he said of course I could.

So I carried George's guitar in and I was quite surprised to find out that he was one of the Beatles, with Paul and John, who I also knew. They had a remarkable appearance on stage. We were used to most of the groups wearing shiny pink or red suits, and the Beatles went on stage wearing jeans, leather jackets and flat caps and cowboy boots, and jumped around the stage like the energetic little sods they were. They played music which hardly anyone had ever heard, like B-sides of Chuck Berry stuff, rhythm and blues, and American songs which we'd never heard in England. They were stunning. There wasn't much of an audience, maybe 50 to 100 people, but they had so much charisma and energy on stage.

The following week I met up with George, I went to see them play again, and by then word had got round and there were a few more people there. Within about six weeks of playing these gigs in really quite small, half-empty ballrooms, the places were absolutely chock-a-block; the hall was full to the rafters with people enjoying themselves. It wasn't new, but it was different. Then the other groups started changing their acts and started doing R 'n' B. The Beatles became the most popular group in Liverpool within a few months.

Q What was the difference between the Beatles you saw at that gig and those they played when they became 'those nice boys from Liverpool'?

You mean the mop-tops? There was not a lot of difference in personality. Not many people outside ever saw the Beatles really perform, because by the time *Please Please Me* had got to number one or two, they were only performing 25-minute sets. Before that, they were playing up to four hours at a time twice a day, and doing the lunchtime session as well. They had this unbelievable work ethic and this catalogue of songs which they performed, including some of their own songs.

The general public never got to see the Beatles as they really were because the amount of gigs outside Liverpool up until *Love Me Do* or *Please Please Me* were pretty negligible. They were in places like North Wales, Cheshire, the Midlands, and maybe Birmingham. By the time they became number one they were just doing 25-35 minutes sets.

Q Can you remember some of the songs they covered?

It was a mixture of stuff. They did country and western, but then everybody did a bit of that. George in particular liked it. John liked the girl harmony groups like the Shirelles. They did Chuck Berry covers and songs by Arthur Alexander, who not many people had every heard about. The Stones also did some Arthur Alexander stuff later, as well.

Paul did Little Richard songs, a few obscure Elvis numbers, show tunes like *Wooden Heart* and *Besame Mucho*, a song he made his own. Paul had a wide cross section of things that he liked to perform. The Chuck Berry songs they did, like *Memphis*, weren't well-known until they did them. They used to scour record shops. They'd go in and get half a dozen records, take them into the booths, listen to them and write down the lyrics, and hand them back and say they didn't want them. I think the shops cottoned on! These were the days before file sharing!

Q Would you say they were four equals from day one?

No, it was always the three of them and then the drummer. In those days in was always Paul, George, and John. George would always share the microphone with whoever was doing harmonies and the other two would have their own. As for their appearance, they all had these quiffs. But then they came back from Hamburg after another trip out there and they had these floppy mop-top heads and corduroys. They had suddenly turned from leather to corduroys and they became Beatles jackets.

Q What did you make of the sacking of Pete Best and his replacement by Ringo?

I always thought that the real difference was that Ringo was more of a Beatle than Pete Best ever was. Pete was a great noisy loud thumping drummer, but he was never with the other three. If you saw them out one night after a gig at the Blue Angel or the other drinking spots, Pete would never be with them. He would always go home with the equipment and his girlfriend Kathy while the other three would be falling around in low dives. Ringo was in those places as well, living a very similar life. And he also shared their sense of humour, which was very important.

Q When did you first join NEMS?

I carried on meeting up with the lads and taking all their equipment into gigs and setting them up on stage with Neil Aspinall. I also went with them to all those obscure places, such as St Helens, Neston, Southport, Northwich and Rhyl. We used to go and just come back; we never stayed overnight. When I left school in 1961 I became an apprentice at the Ford Motor company in Liverpool. I must have learned something about cars, God knows how, though, because I don't have any technical knowledge whatsoever, but I passed some exam and got in.

Not long after that the Beatles got their recording contract. Brian Epstein was their manager and he was always friendly; he didn't go to all the gigs, but he was always friendly when he saw me. It was just after they released *Love Me Do* but before *Please Please Me* when Brian asked me how much I was earning at Ford's. I told him I was earning five guineas a week or something, and then he asked me if I'd like to work with him and for the boys. He said he would pay me £10 a week, which was twice as much. So I said I'd have to ask my mum, and she agreed. Brian said if it all fell through I could always work in record or furniture shops or one of his shops. So that's what I did.

I started in January 1963 as a clerk. In Brian's office there was his PA and a secretary and me. I did lots of things. I'd take posters of gigs to places, and I'd take stuff out to the printers. If any transport needed to be arranged, such as a van being hired, I'd do it. I'd also book hotels. In the evenings I would still go to gigs and go out with the band if they were within travelling distance. At the weekends, I would go to wherever they were to take them the blue packets with their wages in. Then I would stay the weekend then go back and fool around in the office during the weekdays. That's what I did. It was quite wonderful, really, getting paid to hang around with the Beatles.

Q What was their work schedule like in those very early days?
In the first three months of 1963, we did three complete 27-day tours of Britain. One was where they were the opening act for Helen Shapiro, the second as the opening act for Tommy Roe and Chris Montez. The third one started off as the Beatles being second to the great Roy Orbison, but after a few days – although Roy was wonderful – he realised he just couldn't follow the Beatles on the bill. Beatlemania was breaking out, so they became top of the bill and Roy did the support. By then, *Love Me Do*, *Please Please Me* and *From Me to You* had all been hits, and they had the number-one album, but they were still travelling in the coach. We didn't have any facilities on board the coach, no beds or anything. We occasionally had to get off because the Beatles would need to do a TV show along the way. Once a week they had to stay in London to do their own radio show, *Pop Go The Beatles*, and the following the afternoon they'd have to scuttle off to pick up the tour in the evening.

By the end of the Roy Orbison tour, Beatlemania was just getting very noisy; the kids were starting to go a bit bonkers. After the tour we did a series of summer dates, like a week in Great Yarmouth, a week in Bournemouth, Llandudno, Aberdeen,

Blackpool, Southport – seaside resorts, mainly. It started getting a bit hectic when you were locked in a theatre all night or a hotel all day because of kids running around. Then, in autumn 1963 they did Royal Variety Show, and that's when the whole of the West End of London was blocked with screaming kids. From then on it never stopped.

Q The constant sound of screaming girls…

Guys used to be part of it as well! They liked the music, I think, and liked the way the Beatles dressed. It was just piercing, non-stop screaming that you could hear forever. The ratio was probably three girls for every guy, or five for every one, maybe. That sort of thing just doesn't happen now. Maybe the Bay City Rollers got a little bit of the same treatment when they were popular for a while in the Seventies, but that was nowhere near as much as the Beatles.

Click the above photo for a video link

Former Beatles manager Allan Williams reflects on Brian Epstein's role within the group.

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It was like mass hysteria. It was the first time anything like it had been seen – I suppose they were the first boy band. They came just at the right time and they captured the mood completely.

Q Would you care to comment on Brian's role in all this?
Brian made them acceptable to the public, although they were still little rogues in real life. They looked smart and presentable. They didn't swear or smoke on stage anymore. He was the only person at the time that could've turned them into what they were. He was the only person at the time with the drive and perseverance. Anybody else who had been involved with them had just given up. The Beatles might never have even broken out of Liverpool if it hadn't been for Brian.

Other, proper managers, people like Larry Parnes, who managed Billy Fury, had all seen the Beatles and had not paid them much attention or seen their potential. They hadn't cottoned on to what they were all about. Brian was the only one who saw the possibilities, that they could make a record and that they could play further south than Leicester. It wasn't long before he was saying that they'd be bigger than Elvis, and of course they eventually were.

His management style was a bit bizarre, because there had never been a manager like him. He took them under his wing and it was only six months before they got a record contract. Also, as soon as he took them over he doubled and tripled the amount of money they were earning at gigs. Promoters and managers before had just paid them a fiver, or a quid each, thinking that would do. Brian immediately insisted that they got a fair whack out of what was selling at the ticket office. So before *Love Me Do* came out, they were earning £50 a week each, maybe more, which was a damn sight more money and pretty good for a gang of scallywags.

We all learnt a lot from Brian. We were well brought up, but we were ordinary Liverpool kids who were mixing with movie stars

and proper showbiz people, royalty even, people we looked up to. We'd go and have tea with Alma Cogan! Everyone appreciated what Brian did and what he was doing.

It wasn't until the Beatles stopped touring in 1966 that there was any sort of breakdown in relations with Brian. It suddenly dawned on them that they didn't actually need a manager if their record contracts were already set up and done. If they weren't going anywhere, then what were a manager and an agency really going to do for them? They had personal assistants to do their shopping and book them into restaurants and get them theatre tickets.

They realised that they had a manager who took 25% of their earnings for effectively doing nothing, especially as he was also managing Cilla Black, Gerry Marsden, Billy J. Kramer, and the rest of his stable of acts. The NEMS agency had become the biggest agency in the world. The Beatles just stopped having NEMS involved, really, as there was no need for it.

Q Tell me about Neil Aspinall and the role he played in their success.

Neil Aspinall was Pete Best's best friend. He went to school with Pete, he was the only one that could drive, and he – just as important – he had a van. He became the Beatles' road manager. Neil drove the Beatles and their equipment around the country. It was a little bread van, not a fancy one. The Beatles only had three guitars, a set of drums and three amplifiers. That's all they had for their live appearances.

So everyone would travel in the van, and after the gig Neil would drop the other three off and he and Pete would go home with the van and the equipment. When Pete left the Beatles, Brian asked Neil if he would stay. Pete told Neil to stay and hang on in there, so he did. By autumn of 1963, by the time of *I Want to Hold Your Hand*, it just became totally impossible for the Beatles

to travel in the van with the equipment, so Neil then drove them around in an estate car – I think it was a Humber. I was too young to drive, so they got Mal Evans, who was a part-time bouncer at the Cavern Club, to help drive the van and move the equipment around. I used to travel in the van with Mal.

Q And it was not long after that that they cracked America.
Cracking the US was achieved by a combination of things. Because they'd been turned down by EMI Records in America, the Beatles' releases were put out on two little labels, VJ Records and Swan Records. These labels got a bit of press attention for the group, but nothing great. Then, by the end of summer 1963, the *She Loves You* period, Alan Livingstone, who was the president of Capital Records, which was the label of EMI America, for some reason got a bit of the Beatle Bug, and approached Brian about the Beatles records being put out on EMI in the States.

At about the same time, Ed Sullivan happened to be in England and travelling through Heathrow airport on the same day that the Beatles were coming back from Scandinavia, I think it was. He saw Beatlemania at first hand and found out what it was about and offered to put the Beatles on his show sometime in the future. *I Want to Hold Your Hand* was number-one in England, it was a huge record, and the Beatles were doing a Christmas show at the Finsbury Park Astoria.

Meanwhile, Alan Livingstone and Capital Records started doing a major marketing job in America on *I Want to Hold Your Hand*. There were a few key disc jockeys that really went for it. There was a guy called Murray the K – he had a huge influence on the teenage public over there.

In November 1963, President Kennedy had been assassinated. In the wake of his murder, the American public seemed to go into a state of shock. It was a sad time during which their own music was seen to be somehow unsuitable. Then, suddenly, these

loveable mop-tops from Britain came along with *I Want to Hold Your Hand*. It got played on the radio a lot and I think it basically cheered Americans up; it helped to bring the country out of that shock.

So by January 1964, the record had reached number one in America. Ed Sullivan kept his word and Brian negotiated with Sullivan a deal where the Beatles would do two *Sullivan* shows. They went over and did them and because of this buzz that surrounded them, they got probably the biggest TV audience anyone had ever had in America at the time, which just took the whole thing even further. Suddenly they had eight records in the top 10 and five albums in the top 10, all on different labels! It was quite absurd and had never happened before and has probably never happened since.

Q It was amazing that they found time in their hectic schedule to write all that great material…

Well, every chance they had, whether it was in the van or a coach between gigs, or in the hotel room in the mornings or after gigs, they would sit with a pair of acoustic guitars or at a piano and they would crank them out. John and Paul had the thinking that they were going to be professional songwriters. If the Beatle bubble ever burst, they wanted to be in Tin Pan Alley writing songs for people like Frank Sinatra.

So they had this way of doing it. Any spare minute you'd find them at it, although they didn't have chance or the freedom to go out much, anyway. They also needed to keep on writing songs for the ever-increasing number of albums that they had to record. In the first year they had four or five number-one singles and two albums. During the following year they had four singles and three albums, and of course there was all the touring, TV and radio, press – you name it. There were no holidays for them, just constant work.

Q And then, on top of everything else, they got into movies.
A Hard Day's Night, their first film, was a fictionalised version of what the Beatles life was really like. In their everyday lives they were constantly being chased, never sitting down, never getting a minute's peace, and being bullied into doing things they didn't always want to do.

It was like a sort of fly-on-the-wall look, slightly over-exaggerated in places, but the idea of constantly running, jumping, and moving was what it was really like. There were very few moments in those years where they could relax and regroup and think about things. They just carried on touring and being chased and recording, just like in *A Hard Day's Night*. It's a shame it was in black and white, but maybe that was to its artistic benefit.

Q What about the personalities we saw in the film? Were they remotely like that?
Most of their lines in *A Hard Day's Night* were adlibbed, anyway, and they had John pulling faces, George being deep, Ringo being eccentric, and Paul being the charmer. That's pretty much how they were.

Q I'm interested to know how you promoted the records and the films in those days of madness. Personal appearances were out of the question, presumably.
It became physically impossible for the Beatles to do a television show. They could not go to the BBC without Shepherds Bush being blocked off by the police; they could not go to Birmingham to do *Thank Your Lucky Stars*; and they could not go down Kings Way to do *Ready Steady Go!*, because it was unsafe.

The Beatles could occasionally wander around in disguise on their own, but they could not go pre-announced to any studios because the Beatles fans had an amazing collective sixth sense which told them exactly where they were. As soon as one left the

house, or if they were in a hotel, within minutes there would be madness going on.

Also, because it was so international, it was difficult to do those promo things. You couldn't stagger releases around from country to country, because of imports and exports and because of purchase tax, which was around in those days. Purchase tax used to vary a lot, week by week, depending on budget and record sales.

So there were many promotional problems like that. There was a lack of security at the time, and the fact was that every fan in the world wanted the new record the day it was released. Obviously, the Beatles could not physically be in Australia, Japan, England and America at the same time, so to get around the problem Brian and probably Paul decided to make a little film of the records, and just send them that.

I used to go down to Associated-Rediffusion, and I had a friend there who would teach me about TV production, direction, lighting, speeds of film, frames per minute, et cetera, and I must say it was good for me to have that knowledge, because I directed a few quiz shows and I also did a couple of *Ready Steady Go!*s. So Brian told us to set it up and that we were going to spend the day filming.

So we hired a set at Twickenham Studios, which I went into the day before and built some sets with things that appealed to me like planes, buses, cars, and the like. Then we went in, and during the day we filmed, in beautiful black and white, *We Can Work It Out*, *Day Tripper*, *I Feel Fine* and *Help*. We filmed several versions of each in a six-hour day. In the afternoon we filmed 12 separate clips.

These became incredibly popular with the TV stations, and they would pay a lot of money. I think we spent £700 to do all the clips in a day, which led people to ask where this budget was coming from. The American TV shows, that could never hope to get the Beatles in person, paid tens of thousands of dollars just to have one performance of the clip.

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Q So more new ground was being broken there?

Well, it was the freedom. We weren't stuck in Lime Grove all day long. We had a say in what we were doing. We could come back and look at it and decide to do it again if we wanted, whereas at places like the BBC it was just one take and that was it. You never saw what it was like until the next day when you saw it broadcast. It was a bit of relief that they didn't have to keep miming.

It was also good for me and Brian, because a lot of TV shows asked if we could do it for them as well, so we were suddenly producing English versions of American TV shows like *Where the Action Is* and *The Dick Clark Show* and *Shindig*. We were hiring our studios everywhere and filming the Yardbirds, Herman's Hermits, Sandy Shaw, Freddy and the Dreamers.

We were videoing wherever and whoever we could get and sending those clips over to America as well – the Rolling Stones on the Thames Embankment, things like that. Then we filmed three days of the Richmond Rhythm and Blues Festival, with people like the Animals, Rod Stewart, and Manfred Mann. We then did the musical, Lennon and McCartney, a Beatles special.

We'd already done the Shea Stadium show, but we remade it. We re-edited it; we re-did the sound track, things which we didn't know we could do. Although Shea Stadium looked wonderful in places, certain bits weren't right and the sound was atrocious, so we snuck in and over-dubbed it, which nobody ever knew.

The best one we ever did was *Penny Lane* and *Strawberry Fields*, which was the real forerunner of the movie promo. We shot it on 35mm film, no miming, and just had the Beatles doing silly things. It was almost like a proper movie. We spent three days shooting in Technicolor and it cost almost a thousand pounds. Everything the Beatles ever recorded after that we made a film for in some way or another. *Paperback Writer* and *Rain*, we did those really nicely. Oh, apart from *Sgt. Pepper's* that is; we were going to make a film for every single track on *Sgt. Pepper's*, but it never got

done because EMI said it was too expensive and they weren't sure that TV wanted it.

Q But surely EMI were making a lot of money out of the videos?

EMI weren't making any money from the videos. They were selling lots of the records, but we were selling the videos. And they've still never been commercially released as a proper compilation. Boo Apple! Apple doesn't know what they've got in the vaults sometimes.

Q With your film hat on, what did you think then of the *Magical Mystery Tour*?

Well, *The Magical Mystery Tour* was a hangover after Brian died, and also a hangover after *Sgt. Pepper's*. Those songs written pre-*Sgt. Pepper's* weren't used. *Your Mother Should Know* was a song Paul wrote as a possibility, with *All You Need Is Love*, for the *Our World* satellite broadcast in June 1967. *All You Need Is Love* won the vote on that one, so Paul had that, and George had his songs that he'd written. I think John's *I Am the Walrus* was recorded during the *Sgt. Pepper's* sessions.

Then Paul had this idea of the Beatles going on a *Magical Mystery Tour*. They needed to have something to do after Brian's death. The thing with the NEMS people was just unbearable. There were all these people who, instead of concentrating on holding NEMS together as it was, were more concerned with who was going to manage the Beatles. The agents and men in suits in particular were more concerned about that. NEMS seemed to be going nowhere. The Who, Cream, Jimmy Hendrix had all just left the organisation.

So the Beatles, particularly Paul, wanted to get something down, so they just went off and did the *Magical Mystery Tour*. I thought some of it worked very well, the musical bits mainly. The strip-

club sequence with the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band is a lovely little vignette of the time, with that slightly psychedelic feel.

The story line was non-existent, but it was well filmed and well put together. They spent a good few weeks editing it, although that was probably because Paul would edit one way and then John would go in and re-edit the same bit it in a different way, so there was a bit of chaos in there.

It was just a shame that the first showing, which was going to be the culmination and highlight of everything, was shown in black and white in the BBC, when it really should have been seen in Technicolor. The film never got a fair crack of the whip, really.

Q Some said the film would have worked better without the dialogue?

There wasn't much dialogue, anyway!

Q Did it suffer from unreasonable expectations? It seems to sit in a funny position in Beatle history; people still can't really get their heads around it.

The proper Beatles people loved it. It was just the critics that didn't. The Beatles no longer had that protective wall that Brian created all around them, so they were open to attack by then. They never really had the same relationship with the media after the *Magical Mystery Tour*. They were pretty unsinkable up until then, and I think the critics needed to give them a hard time. Of course, the press weren't pandered to at all, and that probably didn't go down well. If Brian had been there and had been able to present it – we used to have little press parties – it would have been stage-managed a bit better, as would its presentation to the public and the media. As it was, it just sold to the BBC.

Q At what point did they cease to be interested in playing live?

The loss of interest in performing was provoked by *Rubber Soul*

and then *Revolver*, principally because they couldn't perform the songs on stage anymore. The EMI engineers and George Martin had used every studio facility at their disposal to make those noises. The Beatles didn't have a sound system, and the equipment required to translate those songs to the live stage just wasn't available. There weren't any synthesisers, and you couldn't carry a big orchestra around with you. Sound systems only existed to accommodate three or four microphones, and you couldn't multi-wire people in those days, so live performances were impossible.

They got stuck on the treadmill of doing only old songs which they could perform as a group, like *Please Please Me*, *A Hard Day's Night*, and *Help*. There was no chance at all of performing songs like *Tomorrow Never Knows*. Plus there was this slight intake of drugs, which made them a bit lazy, and the horrors of the Far Eastern tour, during which they were nearly killed in Manila.

They were on the American tour when John's infamous Jesus quote found its way out; there was people shooting at them, they had death threats – 'Burn the Beatles', 'Stamp out the Beatles', all that stuff. There were security problems in America because the security people at each venue used to walk out and leave them at the audience's mercy because of the Jesus thing.

George in particular got sick and tired of it. He was getting sick and frightened and he didn't like playing on the stage anymore. None of them liked having to keep on doing *Twist and Shout* all the time. The audience couldn't hear them at all because of all the shouting and screaming and the inability of the sound systems to cope. It got to the final gig in San Francisco and George came off stage and said, 'That's it; I'm not a Beatle anymore.' Their car also got crushed by fans – they thought they were going to die that night. So that was it. All those factors meant no more touring, no more live shows.

Q In some ways, it's astonishing they continued playing live as long as they did…

You see, I don't think the Beatles actually ever realised how big they were. They knew they were a pretty big band; they were a remarkably good live band. On a good day, if you could hear them, of course, they were an incredibly good, tight band. They knew that. They knew they were writing great songs; everyone told them so. So many people were recording their songs, there masses of versions of their hits, and they were selling bucket-loads. They knew all that, but I don't think they truly realised what a huge influence they were on society and culture until after they'd been Beatles.

Q Were you aware of it? To what extent was that generation defined by the Beatles?

You probably won't find anyone who lived in the sixties who doesn't have some sort of Beatles influence in them. The Beatles influence is still just as strong as it was. For example, I go to these conventions in America, and you get 60,000 people at them. Oasis playing to audiences of 5,000 puts it into perspective. These conventions are big events. Their albums still have been the biggest selling albums over the world even in the past few years. They still sell bucket-loads. The influence is still there.

Q People say the Beatles songs are the soundtrack to their lives. Do you feel that way?

I never listen to the Beatles records, because I was there. I've done other things since then. I'm one of the few people who didn't actually stop when they broke up. I wasn't always associated with them and I've done other things. People who don't know who they are, or might have seen me or bought my book, stop me in the street and ask me questions. It's always nice.

It's an amazing thing to have been involved in. Only a handful of people were actually involved with the Beatles' lives and their

careers. Acts nowadays have huge retinues. The Beatles never had that. The maximum amount of people at one time was probably ten, and that included the group itself. So there was all that privacy, and it's always nice to think that I was there, and that I know them, and am still friends with the drummer and bass player.

Q When, in your opinion, did the Beatles start to disintegrate or move on as a group?

After Brian's death, the *Mystery Tour*, and after they'd had the Maharishi experience in India, they started having lives of their own. It was no longer John, Paul, George, and Ringo. John got very lazy; he just stayed at home. Ringo went clubbing. George started writing songs and working with other musicians, he – or any of them – had never done before. Suddenly George is best friends with Eric Clapton, Billy Preston. He had a little group of friends of his own, and people were suddenly realising what a good guitarist he was, rather than just the guy who did the twiddley bits and the 'oohs' and 'aahs' in the Beatles, and who occasionally had his own song. These wonderful musicians became rather thrilled to play with George Harrison.

Paul had already been involved with the occasional record production for people. He lived in London, whereas the other three lived in Surrey, so they didn't mix with people in the West End. Paul was always out at the theatre, cinema, and events, and being sociable. He was getting involved with producing other people and working with other artists. He was doing stuff with the Bonzos and making experimental music long before John and Yoko were. Paul was holding the Beatles together. It was him that went into Abbey Road every other day, as he lived across the road from it, and fiddled with tapes and produced and wrote constantly for the *White Album*, *Abbey Road* and *Let It Be*.

John had become very lazy and had got involved with Yoko, who wasn't a stabilising influence on the group. In all those years they

had been together, wives and girlfriends did not get involved in anything they did as Beatles. In my opinion, you shouldn't take your wife to work.

When Yoko, bless her cotton socks, spent time in the studio and started making suggestions, it was a bit too much for George to take. Ringo left a couple of times; he just didn't want to be there anymore. Paul once again did try and hold things together. He wanted to get back on the road. As technology had just started catching up, there was a possibility of them being loud enough to overcome the audience noise, but by then George had lost interest, John had Yoko, and it was just left to Paul to pull things together, and it didn't work.

Q How much did you see them at that time? What was your involvement by this point?

I was head of promotion for Apple and head of Apple films. Apart from what came out on Apple records by the Beatles, there were the Modern Jazz Quartet, Billy Preston, Mary Hopkin, and James Taylor. They were wonderful acts selling great records. We had the publishing to people like Dr John and Steve Miller, a lot of those San Francisco bands, so I'd been plugging their records and doing little films for them as well.

Paul was very interested and keen on films, so we made loads of silly little films like car journeys, gigs, walking in the park, walking the dog – we did lots of things like that. We tried to make a couple of big movies. We started making the film *Walkabout*, actually. I don't know if you're familiar with that movie? It starred Jenny Agutter. United Artists eventually pulled the plug on it and handed it over to Nic Roeg, but we sorted out the locations and got the artists for it.

There was a sort of madcap idea to do the new Beatles movie. It was going to be *The Lord of the Rings*. But yet again, the technical methods needed to make *The Lord of the Rings* didn't exist then – I mean things like little people against big people, things like that –

so it was too much bother to make. There was also a bit of a battle as to who would be Bilbo and who would be Gandalf between John and Paul, so it never got done. The Beatles were going to do a film with Jean-Luc Goddard which took ages to negotiate and then the Stones walked in and did it in a week.

Q Was there anything you regret that they didn't do?
That they didn't go out and do a proper farewell show. The concert on the roof was fine, but the idea was to do a proper big concert in an amphitheatre or somewhere like the desert where the Beatles would do a whole show for the full four hours, but no one ever got round to doing it. The idea of using the QE2 came into it, and then there was going to be an amphitheatre in Morocco or Algeria or somewhere, but it finished up being planned for the Roundhouse, as it was, up in Camden in London. It was going be for a charity, but nobody could decide what charity it would be. All these hippies were involved. So it finished up being on the roof of Apple as a quick half-hour show. It would've been lovely to do a proper, full-on farewell. That might have gone down so well that it may have encouraged them to carry on!

Q Why was something like that so difficult to make happen?
Well, they weren't talking to each other a lot. They all had separate advisors who had no rock and roll experience. They used to ask them things in a negative way – 'You don't want to do this do you?' That's sort of thing used to happen. Then Paul just announced that he had left the group, basically. But John had already left; he just didn't announce it. George had already left years before. Then Paul just went public and said, 'That's it.'

Q You've already said that George came to command great respect from other musicians outside the Beatles. Do you think you think being a Beatle eventually stifled him?

You see, George had a different view. During the early days, it was George that used to do novelty numbers like *I'm Henry the Eighth*, *The Sheik of Araby*, and *Take Good Care of My Baby*, the sort of light-hearted pop songs as opposed to the other guys' more meaty songs. He was a far better guitarist than anybody credited him for.

He was also writing, but he wasn't prolific like the other two. The other two could just churn them out every ten minutes. They could time each other, if it wasn't finished in half an hour they'd just throw it away. George used to take the time to fine-tune his songs and then present them to the others. That's why he only had the odd songs on the first few records. It wasn't until *The White Album* that George had a big stack of songs to record, because he'd had the time off to be able write them, but the other two also had a big stack of songs, so in a sense they won again. So George had to wait, and then he went ahead and did them on his solo album, *All Things Must Pass*, the first-ever triple album, with all these great song that he'd been sitting on. People seemed to like it.

Q He must have felt pretty good about that.

Yes, he was so proud of it. He'd written all those songs for *The White Album*, so they were all ready to go. The Beatles had even played some of them when they all got together round George's house for a few days, during which they ran through some of the songs before recording the album. He recorded them beautifully on his album, though, with a big band and lots of star players. He loved it. He was very proud of it.

Q And in your view, how important was George Martin to the Beatles' success?

George was hugely important. Recording studios were rather different places then; you couldn't just wander around in those days. There had to be someone in charge of this expensive

equipment. EMI was more like a laboratory; it wasn't like these do-it-yourself places that you have nowadays.

People wore white and brown coats and called each other 'Mister' and 'Sir', and they wore ties. There were no fun rooms, no canteens. There was a coffee machine and maybe a soft drinks machine, but that was about it. If you wanted anything to eat you had to go out, and if you wanted anything to drink or to pass the time when you weren't needed, you had to go out to the pub and play darts or something. There wasn't a pinball machine or a pool table or anything.

Making records was a serious business, so somebody had to be in charge on EMI's behalf. That person was George Martin. He was brilliant. He understood almost immediately what the Beatles were about – well, maybe originally he didn't quite get them, but after a few sessions with them he realised what they were and how talented they were. He could only compliment them.

One thing, though – George may have been responsible for the Beatles' sound, but even he couldn't touch the recording studio buttons. George wasn't qualified! He was head of Parlophone Records, but the producers weren't allowed to touch the controls. Only the men in the brown coats could, and that was it.

The Beatles weren't allowed to touch anything. They couldn't even move a microphone. The brown coats had to come and get the drum sound right. Ringo couldn't just get up and pull the mike down; a man in a brown coat had to come and do it.

But George Martin had something the Beatles didn't – the ability to read music, and therefore to write the music down, which helped when they needed to be augmented by other instruments. He could also play the piano very well, which he did on lots of the records.

Q Do you know how George felt when Paul went public and announced it was the end?

Well, George had already stopped, really. He hadn't worked with them really since *Sergeant Pepper*, and he wasn't at the those sessions a lot because by then John and Paul had most of the tricks and had driven the EMI engineers and staff into such a state that they did a lot of it themselves. George Martin had got back with them for Abbey Road, but we all knew that Abbey Road was going to be the last record; it was Paul's attempt at tidying up the mess left after the *Magical Mystery Tour* and the *Let It Be* film and record. George was virtually at retirement age, anyway.

Q We haven't talked about dear old Ringo much!

Everybody adored Ringo – friends, mothers, grandparents, children – everybody. Ringo was liked across the board. Paul might've been the favourite of one section of the fans, George and John might have been the favourites of others, but everybody liked Ringo. Ringo probably wasn't anybody's favourite, but they adored him because he was just Ringo. He's a wonderful drummer, and his boy Zak is a wonderful drummer, too. Don't forget he was the first Beatle to have a solo number-one! Being Ringo was a great job to have.

Ringo enjoyed the life. He didn't hide from it. It didn't embarrass him. He was proud to be Ringo the Beatle. He loved meeting and mixing with Burton, Taylor, Elvis, and big stars and being on the same level as them. He was, after all, genuinely from the back alleys of Liverpool, whereas us lot said they were but actually weren't. He liked going out and being sociable; that's how he was. He could also dance. The other three couldn't dance to save their lives. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but you can't dance to Beatle records! People do very silly dances when they try and dance to Beatles stuff.

Q I'd noticed that on the bit in the *Mystery Tour* when they are in their white suits. They're all stepping out at different times!

And that was choreographed for hours! We would say, 'All together now – one, two, three…', but no, it never happened. None of us ever learnt to dance because we used to go to the dance halls to play and work. I can probably just about twist, maybe a bit of jive.

Q What about Lennon, was he easy to develop a friendship with? Lots of the people I've talked to seem to have either really gelled or just didn't gel with him.

John wasn't as deep as everybody thinks he was. He was short sighted, which he was embarrassed about. He was also embarrassed because his weight used to fluctuate. He was a treasure; if you got to know him and he got to know you, he was wonderful. He could be merciless about any weaknesses or peculiarities you might have; if you had a twitch or something like that, he would be absolutely wicked about it. He would pick on things like that. He would always find somebody's foible and he would know when he'd got it and how to use it if he felt like it, but not always, though.

He was great fun to go out with, and he was a wonderful rock and roll singer. He could certainly drink very well, although he used to get dreadfully drunk very quickly. Occasionally he could be a bit lippy, but he was great fun.

Q Was he hard on himself?

No, I don't think so. I think he knew he was perfect! Ha!

Q How did the dynamics within the band change over the years?

They all hung out together up until the *Revolver* period, I suppose – up until they stopped touring. You could go into any club in town – the Speak Easy, the Revolution, wherever it might be – and you'd be guaranteed to see them. If one was there, at least three, maybe all four would also be there. Even if you walked into the wrong place, someone would be able to point you in the right direction and to the right club. They were never far away.

They had such a small group of friends. Neil Aspinall, Mal Evans and Brian and I were the only ones who socialised with them. Nobody else from the offices who worked with them, like the press-office people, the secretaries, or the other NEMS people socialised with them much. On top of that, there'd be the people they got on with well, like the guys in the Stones and the Animals. Later on, all that changed. It's hard to put into words, because they were still very good at meeting people. After the initial success, I suppose, they became much more wary of strangers, and the likelihood that they might sell kiss-and-tell stories about them to the press. They simply became very discreet about whatever they did.

Q It must have been very helpful for your working relationship with them that you were all on the same wavelength…

Certainly. Where the promotional films were concerned, I could do just about whatever I wanted, although they would throw in a few ideas. As long as it looked pretty and it wasn't embarrassing, it was okay. It was the same with photo sessions – same with almost everything. As long as it was up to Beatle standards, it was fine. If ever a third party was involved, you used to really look into it. If somebody suggested an idea for a lighting effect, for example, they'd be the first to shoot it down because the idea had come from somebody else and not from within. Their stage clothes, for instance, that was all them. Anybody who tried to tell them otherwise didn't get very far.

Q Do you know how George was feeling about his work at the time of his death? Was he happy with everything he'd achieved or did he feel there was lots more to do?

By the time George died he was tidying up bits and pieces of his work. They'd done the *Free as a Bird* project and he was re-

mastering all of his own stuff, and also that of the Travelling Wilburys, to take advantage of the wonders of CD. There was a big demand for them. Of course, he left an unfinished album that was eventually completed after his death by his son Dhani, with the help of his good friend Jeff Lynne. It was called *Brainwashed* and it was well received.

He'd given up being involved with movies, with Handmade Films, because he'd become disillusioned about the business. I think he was enjoying being George the gardener, the racing driver, and, more than that, a father. George used to scuttle around the world a lot. He had his places in Hawaii, Australia, and he went to all the grand prix. He was enjoying himself non-stop, enjoying being George, not George the ex-Beatle.

Q And Paul is still going strong…

Paul was always the pop star; he wanted to be Elvis. Nothing less would do. He was the cute one. He's always been the same old thumbs-up Paul. His post-Beatle career has had its ups and downs, I suppose. There have been good albums, mediocre albums, and some great albums. He's been doing wonderful stage shows the past few years, just phenomenal, since he took the plunge and started doing some old Beatles songs. He's doing amazingly well. He's doing what he does best; he just loves being on stage and he's brilliant at it without being the great showman or turning it into awful cabaret. He's turning out as good rock and roll at the age of 65 as he was when he was a kid.

Q When you look back on your work with the Beatles, what are the things you're most proud of and the things you hold dearest?

Looking back at it, I'm proud of all the little films we created. I'm proud of all the friends I made during the period and of being involved with them. As I said, I'm still friendly with Paul. I made

a lot of friends and built a good reputation, which I think I've still got. I'm very proud that I was involved with the biggest act in the world.

Q What was the lowest point?

It was Brian's death and the last few days of Apple. Lawyers had no right to be involved in anything as personal as the Beatles. When the day finally arrived and the divorce came, I felt so sorry for those poor kids that worked there and all the fans. I wondered what they were going to do. There was millions of members in their fans clubs, and we knew they were going to be so upset, and of course they were. But that's what happens when people get divorced; there's always people let down in the end.

Q How much did Liverpool mean to them all?

Liverpool was like a big melting pot where we came from, but luckily we all escaped it. Liverpudlians by and large don't travel well, which is why a lot of the other bands never carried on. The Beatles had an international flavour. They managed to leave Liverpool behind and base themselves in London or anywhere in the world that was required, without having to go home and have their mum's roast beef on a Sunday.

Most Scouse bands would be homesick by the time they got half way down the M1. They'd want to go back to their mum. They'd come down to London from Liverpool and complain about the hotels and the cockneys. They'd travel half the night so they could wake up back in Liverpool the next morning in their own bed with a bacon buttie next to them. They never became cosmopolitan or gained that international attitude like the Beatles did.

That's what Liverpool is, a very strong place. You can't get rid of the accent. It's been 50 years and I still can't lose it. I was invited up there for the reopening of the Casbah Club, which coincided with the launch of the new print of *Yellow Submarine*. I was in

the hotel and Allan Williams was in the background, and this kid comes up to me and it was Roag Best, Pete's brother. I hadn't seen Roag since he was five or six. He was dreadfully drunk and speaking in such a strong Liverpudlian accent that I became quite exasperated! Roag must be in his forties now.

If you go back to Liverpool now, everything's changed. The streets are different. The Cathedral and the Liver Building are the same, but that's about it. Everything else has moved on. But it was definitely an important place to grow up in. None of us were like Scallies or Scousers. The Beatles weren't Scousers. They were Liverpudlian, yes, but we weren't professional Scousers.

Q And how the music business would love to see another Beatles arrive on the scene…

I don't think they ever will. I don't think any band is given the time to mature into an all-round unit today. In this day and age, what with reality TV and all those force-fed media situations, no band is allowed to get together and hone itself and mature slowly in the public eye as the Beatles managed to do.

Nowadays, people pass an audition, release a record, and get to number one in the charts, and they've never done a day's work in their lives. They might have done an ordinary day job, but they've never done a tour of the toilets of England. You can't instantly learn stagecraft, or expect your voice to hold up because it just hasn't been trained for it.

And the public are so fickle with everything. You hear a record on the radio, and it's not out until six weeks later, and by the time it's out, no one notices. It's force-fed. We used to treat records like newspapers; you'd finish recording one on Friday and the following Friday it would be in the shops. We didn't just record them and then wait six weeks for it to be manufactured. These days there's instant technology; you should be able to have them manufactured and dished out to the public immediately. I don't think the public

has the patience to watch a band grow and mature as people and musicians before their very eyes like the Beatles did. They just have their pop stars forced onto them by Simon Cowell!

Tony Barrow

Apart form the music itself, one of the great pleasures of owning those early Beatles records was to be able to read their splendid sleeve notes. The sleeves would provide a terrific breakdown of who did what on which track. The notes would say things like, 'Ringo hits out at a loose-skinned Arabian Bongo to pound on the on beat percussive drive' and 'While Paul was overdubbing the piano bits, John was standing beside another microphone adding the neatly timed harmonica phrases' and '*Money* makes a completely worthy climax to this knock-out programme. Hope it doesn't leave you too breathless to flip back to side one for a repeat play.' The man responsible for these gems was Tony Barrow.

Barrow had been working freelance for the *Liverpool Echo*, which at the time was the largest selling provincial evening newspaper in the country, since 1954. He was a local boy with an interest in music, having been involved with presenting jazz and folk bands in the city, and he found himself writing the *Echo*'s record reviews under the name of Disker.

When Brian Epstein was looking for a press and publicity consultant to launch *Love Me Do*, the Beatles' first record, it was Disker that he called, although he must have been slightly bemused to have his call returned by a young man working in London. More than that, the young man was employed by Decca, the company that had so recently turned down the opportunity to sign the group.

During the interview which follows, Tony Barrow explains how he eventually became one of the longest-serving members of the Beatles entourage. The man who coined the phrase Fab Four worked as their publicist until the formation of Apple in 1968.

Tony Barrow went on to form his own PR consultancy, which built an impressive roster of international stars, including Andy Williams, Neil Sedaka, Tony Bennett, David Cassidy, and Gladys Knight. These days he has left the hurly-burly world of PR behind and has returned to freelance journalism and broadcasting work.

Q Tony, how did you first meet Brian Epstein, and how did you become involved with the Beatles?

It all started really for me when Brian Epstein wrote to me in 1961. I had only just moved to London from Liverpool and I was working at Decca records as, I think, the only full-time sleeve-note writer in Britain. I was also doing as a side line the *Liverpool Echo* record column, which I had been doing since sixth-form school days. Anyway, he wrote to me at the *Liverpool Echo*, addressing his letter to my non de plume, which was Disker, and to his surprise got a letter back from somebody named Tony Barrow in London.

He came to see me at Decca and he brought with him an acetate, a demo disc that he said had been made by a television company who were making a documentary about the Beatles at the Cavern Club, and he said that this acetate had been taken from the sound track and that's why it was poor quality. It was only many years later that I discovered that this was a little white lie,

because what he had actually done was stand in the middle of the Cavern with a very old Phillips cassette tape recorder and held it aloft in the air and got the sound from around him. That was the reason for the rough quality.

The sound of the Cavern Club that he had captured was great. You could feel the electrifying feeling, the ambiance of this place, the excitement of it, but you certainly couldn't tell very much about his band. You couldn't tell what the Beatles were like, and I kind of did a 'Don't call us, we'll call you' thing on him at Decca. However, it wasn't my place to hire or fire the talent. I was there to write these liner notes, sleeve notes for the albums, but I really didn't see that what he had got there was anything special from what he had played to me.

When he left the Decca building I picked up the internal phone and rang, not the production department, not the producers, not the artists' people at all, but the marketing department at Decca on the internal phone, because I knew that Brian Epstein had record shops in Liverpool.

Q At first, the people in the marketing department said, 'Epstein? Epstein – no, don't know that name. Is that the name of the shops?'

I said, 'No, the shops are called NEMS – North End Music Stores.'

Immediately the marketing department sprang to attention and saluted and said NEMS, one of our greatest customers in the northwest of England. This band has to have an audition.

It was through me and a number of other people – I mean, he obviously sort of pushed the local sales reps and everybody else whose attention he could get – that the audition came about. So, several different people were all saying to the A&R department at Decca that they should audition the Beatles. All this led to what became the infamous disastrous audition on New Years Day in 1962.

You know the myth down the years has always been that every other major record company in London turned the Beatles down. What they actually turned down was not the Beatles, but that same Decca audition tape, because that's all Brian Epstein had to hawk round. They were turning it down because it wasn't a very good audition. It was a long time afterwards that I heard the Decca audition tracks, and I must confess that if I had been listening to them as a producer, I don't think I would have contracted the Beatles. It was badly recorded and it was not a good session.

Q So, when was it next that you met the boys?

What happened then was that Brian kept in touch with me over the following six or nine months. I was one of the few people that he knew in London. On a record-retailing level he was a

Click the above photo for a video link

Ex-Beatles publicist Tony Barrow recalls hearing the Beatles for the first time.

meticulous and diligent kind of guy. If anybody came to the shop and asked for an obscure record he would always get hold of it for them, for example. So he knew the record retailing side of the business inside out, but he really didn't know anybody on the artistic side in London, and certainly no one on the music papers and so on. He kind of relied on me, picked my brains, to be put in touch with some of these people.

Eventually, he got the contract for the Beatles with George Martin at EMI for the Parlaphone label. *Love Me Do* was due out in October 1962, and Brian asked me if he should be doing anything to promote it himself. I said to him, 'Well, as a record reviewer I do receive stuff not just from the record company but from an independent PR hired by the management or the band themselves.'

So he said, 'Could you do a press manual for the Beatles launch?', and for a princely sum of, I think it was about £20, I did this whole press manual that went out to DJs, record reviewers, radio producers, television people, and the rest, to coincide with the release of *Love Me Do*.

Something that is not generally known is that this was the second time around for the Beatles at EMI, because at the end of 1961 EMI turned them down. EMI had actually said no to the Beatles. So that by the time that he did manage to do this agreement with the in-house producer, George Martin, he already had black marks against him and against his group as far as some people within EMI were concerned.

Now, lets be honest, EMI did not do a good promotional job at all on the Beatles in the beginning. They picked up rather late on the Beatles' success and didn't see their potential at all. I have it on first-hand authority from somebody who was in the actual promotional meetings EMI had when each week's releases were discussed, and it was decided what kind of priority they would have for promotion purposes. At the meeting when *Love Me Do*,

the first single, came up, the head of promotion embarrassed George Martin by saying, you know, 'George what are you doing? This is rubbish. You are never going to get anywhere with this.'

So, knowing that, it wasn't very surprising to find out that EMI had downgraded the Beatles promotional activity; they had different levels of promotional activity, and the Beatles were at the very bottom of the pile.

Q It's hard to believe, isn't it?

So, there wasn't that much co-operation or enthusiasm on the part of EMI at the time of the launch of the Beatles!

Q So this is where you helped out, then?

Yes. What I did was take over the whole PR operation, and work with the record company and the management, or with the music publisher or whomever, but to take the sort of central role in the whole PR campaign. In a number of cases, including the Beatles, it was really necessary.

It was quite a while before I was able to get the national newspapers very interested. Up here in Liverpool the record went straight to number one. It was immediately bought in large quantities, but not quite as large quantities as the local record retailers had imagined.

There is this story that Brian Epstein bought about 10,000 copies of the first single to buy it into the charts. Well, the truth of it is that it went straight to number one in Liverpool, on the strength of the actual sales figures for the Merseyside area. I can promise you that, because I was around at the time and I know that's true.

But Brian Epstein did burn his fingers, because he had bought too many copies, although he was not alone. I'm pretty sure that a number of retailers in Liverpool, not just NEMS, bought extra large quantities, expecting the Beatles to be huge sellers. They weren't. They sold enough to make it to number one in the area

at the time, but they did not sell in the huge numbers that a lot of people locally in the business had hoped and thought, simply because the kids in Liverpool wanted to keep their Beatles, and they figured that if the Beatles got too big they would immediately leave Liverpool, that if the Beatles gained national and international popularity they would be lost to Liverpool and the Beatles would not come down to the Cavern Club anymore, and they didn't want that.

Q And you ended up working for Brian?

Eventually, yes. He said, 'Leave Decca. Join me at NEMS Enterprises, open the new London office, and let's go from there.' He said he was going to have a lot of other artists as well – I think he named Gerry and the Pacemakers and Cilla Black – and he said all these artists would be coming along soon. He said he needed to open a press office in London for them and would I head that up?

At first I said no, because I had a nice secure job, thank you very much, at Decca, and my parents were against it; Decca was a good, substantial company. What does this guy with a band and a local record shop – what does he know? It seemed like it was a better career move to stay put where I was at Decca.

Then Brian said to me, 'I won't ask what your salary is at Decca records, but whatever it is, I will double it.'

Well, that was an offer that somebody like myself, recently married and down from Liverpool, couldn't resist. With London rent and rates and everything else to pay, and a new wife in tow, how could I possibly refuse a doubling of my salary? So that's how I actually came to say yes to Brian's offer.

Q When did you first meet the group?

Well, there had to be a meeting with the boys, because up to then I had done all their PR stuff on the phone with them. They were at home in Liverpool and I hadn't met them, so it was arranged that

there would be a meeting at this little pub off Manchester Square, a place that's still there to this day, and we were all going to meet up over a casual drink and Brian figured quite rightly that this was a good way for them to get to know me and for each of us to decide whether we could work with one another happily or not.

The first words that I got from John Lennon that night were, 'If you're not queer and you're not Jewish, what are you coming to work for Brian Epstein for?'

I realised as time went by that this was a fairly mild for John. It sounded at the time an eye-popping remark to make, especially to somebody whom you didn't know, but this was mild stuff for John Lennon. John came out with a lot of acid remarks, caustic remarks, cruel remarks, and a lot of very funny ones too.

Throughout that evening at the pub the role of host for the evening was immediately assumed and played very, very well by Paul McCartney. My first lingering memory of him is how he went round us all, round the rest of the group, round myself and my wife, Brian, the roadies, and everybody and asked them what they wanted to drink, and then said, 'Right, it's doubles all round, aye lads?', and off he went to the bar and ordered up all these drinks.

When the guy behind the bar eventually gave him the price £2.14.03, or whatever it was, only then did Paul say, 'Er, Brian?' So, although the genial host Paul had been seen to host the occasion and get a round in, it was Brian who actually picked up the tab. Now that was typical Paul McCartney – he would get away with murder. Over the years, I think he must have smoked thousands of my cigarettes. It got to such a stage in the end that I started putting cigarettes down on my expenses each month, and when I put them in to Brian Epstein he didn't query it at all, he just paid up.

The so-called quiet one amongst the Beatles was George Harrison, although actually he was a great womaniser. I would say that he probably had more notches on whatever he put them on

than any of the other three Beatles combined. He was certainly a ladies' man. He always spoke fairly softly, and therefore he got this reputation for being quiet. That was largely because he would speak to you with his nose almost touching yours, and if you were watching this from across a room you would think that something highly confidential was being said. In fact, all George was probably saying was what a nice new guitar he had bought himself, or one of his guitar strings went last night.

George was the guy who always remembered your name – in fact, not just your name, but the name of your girlfriend, or your partner, or whomever, too. He would remember a conversation from two weeks ago and would remind you of something that you had said to him at the time. He was interested in you. He was totally unlike the general perception of the pop idol. In other words, he was interested in those around him and interested in listening as well as talking about himself.

Ringo, as we know, was a late arrival with the Beatles. The others had all got together in the late fifties, but Ringo didn't join them until 1962. If they had been in their thirties at the time, it might not have mattered so much, but, at that time, to not have been around for those first few years proved, I think, was quite an obstacle for him. It made him feel somehow inferior.

He had also been dogged with ill health during his teenage years. He had been in and out of hospital with a lot of gastric problems, and had missed a lot of his schooling, and I think that affected his confidence. Now, if you were able to speak to any of the other Beatles, they would be absolutely amazed that any impression might have been given that they treated him as an inferior, and they didn't, but I'm certain that there was this feeling in Ringo's mind that he wasn't quite one of the original clique. He wasn't in on anything. He was the drummer who joined later.

This feeling with him was perpetuated by the fact that inevitably the drummer is the last to be involved in the production process of

making a new record. He certainly wasn't involved in the writing, because that was all John and Paul, and to a much lesser extent George, so he was left out of it until they were ready to actually make the record. Then they'd say, 'This is how we want the drums to sound.' Until then, Ringo would sit and play cards. He would sit in the corner of the EMI studio playing poker with the roadies. He wasn't involved until the last part of the process.

This was carried through into conversations, not intentionally, certainly not deliberately, but in general conversations, policy meetings, and the rest of it, everybody would be talking amongst themselves until finally Ringo would suddenly come up with one line, which would often be a devastatingly funny one. It would be a punch line to end all punch lines, and we'd all say, 'I wish I had said that!'

Q What was your impression of Pete Best, and why was he kicked out?

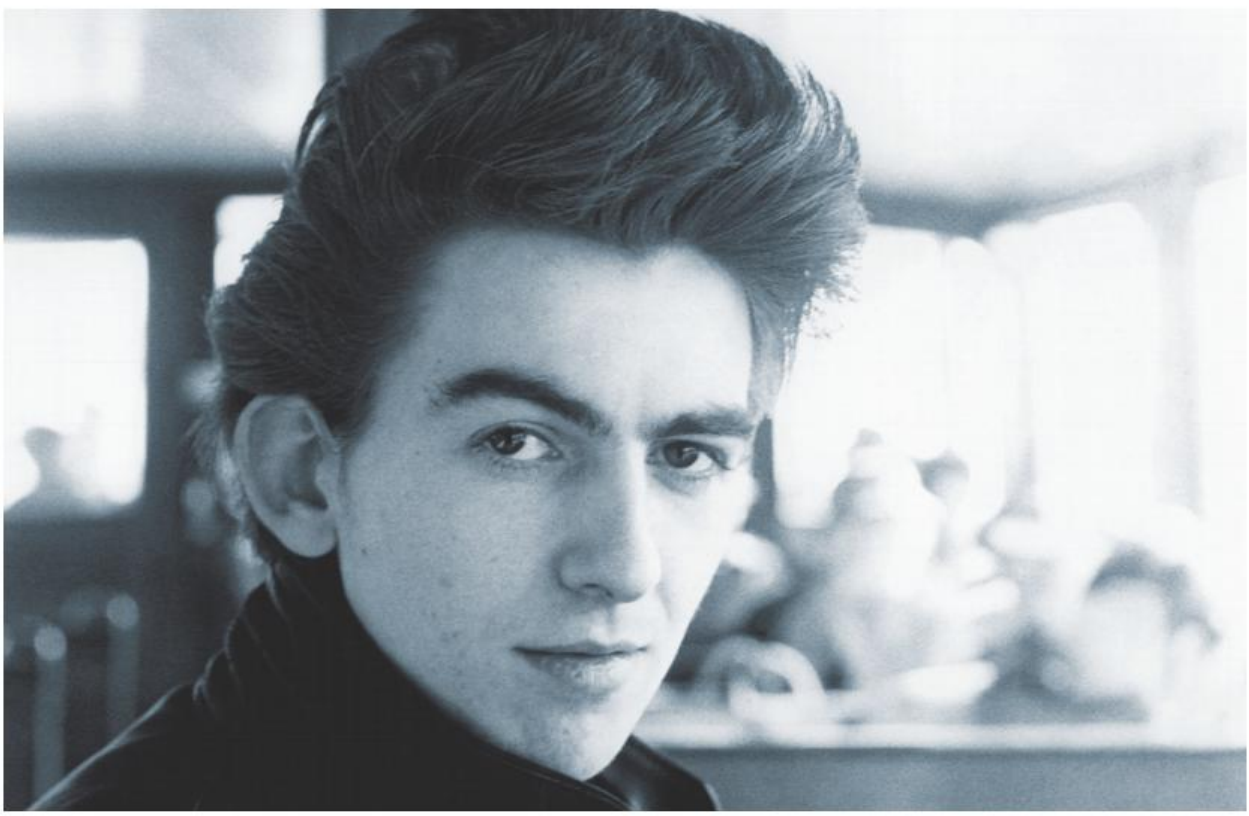
I can best answer that, I think, by quoting John Lennon. At the very beginning I asked John what the situation was with Pete Best, and John said, 'Pete Best is a great drummer, but Ringo Starr is a great Beatle.' I knew exactly what he meant, although I was only just getting to know the Beatles at the time. And that is the point. Pete Best was fine as a musician, no problems, but somehow he just wasn't a Beatle, whereas Ringo took very naturally to the role of one of the Fab Four. Having said that, of course, the Pete Best situation was very much more complicated and complex than people realised at the time or even know now.

Q Care to expand on that?

Well, a very strong influence behind the Beatles' early bookings was Mona Best, Pete Best's mother. She was around at the time that Pete and the rest of the Beatles were signed by Brian Epstein. I believe that Brian Epstein, who was jealously possessive of his

artists, would never have countenanced the idea of having anybody else, especially a woman and least of all the drummer's mother, being involved in any way, even in an unofficial capacity.

So, Pete's talent was undoubted, he looked good, and he sounded good on stage with the Beatles. There has been talk that there was a bit of jealousy on Paul's part, but I don't know whether that was a real factor in his sacking; you would have to ask other people that one. But it was not because Pete wasn't talented. John may have been right. Perhaps Pete just wasn't a Beatle and didn't fit in with the gang of four, although Pete does deny it and has denied it personally to me, actually. I do believe that the whole business of Brian Epstein and Mona Best, and the potential problems that there would have been on the management side of things did play their part in Pete having to be dropped from the band at that time. I know he was absolutely and utterly devastated.



Click the above photo for a video link

Tony Barrow looks at the reasons for Pete Best's departure from the Beatles.

Q When would you say Beatlemania started? Was there a single moment in time?

I suppose it was the autumn of 1963. A lot of people reckon that Beatlemania began because of the Royal Variety show that they did that year, but a few weeks before that they did a show called Sunday Night at the London Palladium, which was the variety television spot of the entire week at that time. Now, the Beatles had not been around much or been in the public eye for a few weeks before that, and the strange thing was that they could walk down streets and be in places alone or with other friends, and people didn't bother them too much. It was when they were together that they were mobbed. Suddenly there was this wave of on-screen plugs, trailers for the Sunday night at the London Palladium show. So, since this was a live show, thousands and thousands of Beatles fans who hadn't seen much of John, Paul, George, and Ringo for the past few weeks descended upon the London Palladium and upon Argyll Street during the day, knowing that the Beatles would be in there rehearsing.

Also, what happened on Sunday afternoons during the Palladium television season was that journalists, and particularly photographers, would go down, because there were always interesting artists on the London Palladium television bill, especially lots of big American visiting artists. That day they were there in force as usual, and they saw this big crowd of kids outside the Palladium. They were taken as much by surprise as everybody else that this huge fan gathering had descended upon Argyll Street, and went out there and photographed what became the first scenes of Beatlemania. There was no need for encouragement.

I would love to say as the Beatles PR at the time that I had engineered all that, that I had brought that whole thing together and engineered it perfectly, but I didn't. Like so many things with the Beatles, it just happened very naturally. It was those pictures of the crowds and the Beatles having to run the gauntlet out of

the front entrance of the Palladium and rushing down the road looking for their car that did it. It was those pictures that made the front pages on a fairly quiet news Monday morning. They were splashed on the front page, and that was the day that the media coined the word Beatlemania.

Q So all of that took care of itself?

Yes. With the Beatles, I saw my job as one of projection – projecting and promoting what already existed in the way of talent, personality, charisma, and that amazing Liverpudlian good humour – and that was all quite apart from the music! And, of course, on occasions it was a matter of playing down stuff that one didn't want to see in the papers. I have to say that in those days the media was very co-operative and just wouldn't rush into printing stories I wouldn't have liked, let alone the Beatles.

Click the above photo for a video link

Tony Barrow remembers how Brian Epstein helped the Beatles fledgling career.

A prime example of that was with John Lennon and his first wife Cynthia and their baby son Julian. They were able to conceal the fact that the child existed for a couple of years. This baby was being wheeled round Liverpool in a pram. Local journalists and those from the nationals all knew about this, but because it was the done thing in those days to keep these matters quiet, the press played along. It was not terribly difficult, although they would constantly ask me, 'Can we use it yet? Is it all right? Are you saying anything yet?'

When John took Cynthia on the first visit to America with the Beatles, it was quite embarrassing, because one or two journalists accidentally asked about Cynthia and were terribly apologetic when they realised they shouldn't have. And there were still no unwanted headlines about the married Beatle with the baby son.

Q That's extraordinary, really. Did you ever have any awkward moments with the press?

I suppose the most traumatic occasion from my point of view in the six years I was with the Beatles as their PR concerned John and his outspoken interview with the *London Evening Standard*'s, Maureen Cleave, which was part of a series of in-depth profiles of each of the Beatles. At one point in the conversation he was talking generally about religion and the social priorities of the era, and he made the infamous remark that the Beatles were more popular that Jesus. He didn't say bigger. An awful lot of people have misquoted him, which makes him sound like it was said in a boastful kind of way. You know, look at us, we are bigger than Jesus now. He didn't say that. He said 'we are more popular', and by that he meant that more people were going down to the local Empire theatres or the ABC cinemas to see concerts by the Beatles than were going down to the local church or chapel to worship God or Jesus Christ. It wasn't a boast at all, but a very valid social comment.

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It was buried way down in the *Evening Standard* article. It raised no eyebrows at all, and it certainly didn't startle me as the group's PR. It didn't worry me greatly, and in fact – I have never talked about this before – I can now say that I was actually directly instrumental in helping get that story reproduced in America. Before long there was this massive furore which saw Beatles albums being burnt. There was a threat that the whole of the US tour that year would have to be called off because of the Klu Klux Klan and their threats and all kinds of other threats, particularly from the religious zealots in the Deep South, the Southern states of America.

I was directly responsible for that, because in the pre-tour months, when the Beatles were extremely busy and doing lots of other things, I was unable to get much interview time with American journalists for American magazines, but I appreciated that PR in America was crucial to this massive tour that we were about to undertake.

When the publisher of *Datebook* Magazine, a guy named Art Unger, came on to me and asked if he could do some interviews with the Beatles, I said, 'No, it's just going to be impossible at the moment to meet your deadlines, but what I can do is put you on to Maureen Cleave at the *London Evening Standard*; she has just done a series of superb in-depth profiles of the Beatles, which I think would sit well in *Datebook* Magazine. Art negotiated to get hold of that material, splashed it around *Datebook* Magazine, including a front-page headline, and it was because of that there was this furore in America. Now this led, as I said, to the near cancellation of the Beatles tour that summer.

We arranged a press conference in Chicago on the eve of the tour to try and straighten all this out, and I remember seeing John Lennon beforehand. It was my job to prepare him for this very serious press conference, at which the world's press would be represented, and they were there for one purpose – not for a

light-hearted show-business style press conference at all, but a very serious interrogation where they would all be telling John he had to apologise because he'd insulted the church.

I remember sitting in Brian Epstein's hotel suite with John, and he was saying, 'I'll say whatever you tell me I should be saying, but I don't feel I have to apologise. I've said nothing intentionally blasphemous or insulting, but I will say whatever you want me to say.'

At one point during our conversation he was sitting there, most uncharacteristically, with his head cupped in his hands, and he was sobbing. He was weeping. I don't think it was the prospect of the press conference itself, so much as the fact that he realised that if he didn't get it all right the tour might be cancelled and he might be letting down the rest of the group.

The press conference was held in my suite. It was absolutely heaving. Wall-to-wall photographers, journalists, radio people, television people – the lot – just crammed into that room, and they questioned John very closely, and they were expecting to draw out of him a direct apology for what he had said. Now, the problem with John was that, whilst he could put down beautiful ideas in lyrics and do it in such a way that he communicated perfectly with those who heard them, in a situation like that, where he was called upon to make a speech, he found it very difficult. The words that were in his head somehow didn't come out of his mouth.

He rambled for about 20 minutes, answering assorted questions and saying, 'I didn't mean anything bad by this at all. I was just using the Beatles as an example, that lots of things now are more popular than Jesus. What I am saying is that the popularity of Christianity is on the wane at the moment. I wasn't advocating it or saying it should happen. I was saying that's what is happening. Watch it happen. What is the world going to do about it, or doesn't the world care?'

He rambled on for 20 minutes, and then at the very end of the press conference, somebody at the back of the room shouted, 'Okay, now are you going to apologise John?', and we realised that all the speechifying had more or less been in vain.

The tour went ahead, but it was quite frightening when we got down into the Southern states of America. Particularly, I remember the night in Memphis where the Beatles were on stage and somebody in the crowd let off what the Americans call, I think, a cherry bomb – a firecracker or a firework – in the audience, and immediately everyone looked at John, because we were all half expecting to see him fall down on the stage there with a bullet in his head. We were quite sure that there had been an assassination.

Q Tell me more about touring with the Beatles.

If we are agree that Beatlemania broke out for the first time in 1963, and as far as the Americans are concerned I guess 1964, then the Beatles worked as a touring band for a very short period of time, because by 1966, only two or three years later, they stopped touring. They came off the stage forever. They never did another show.

But there were very good reasons for that, I think. First of all, they couldn't hear themselves on stage for all the screaming. Now, we have to take into account that in those days the sound systems, the PA systems at concert venues, were very much less powerful than they are today. Those amplifiers were just incapable of getting over the sound of the constant screaming that was coming from the auditorium or from the stands if we were playing at a large stadium gig. The Beatles realised that they could be standing there playing bum notes or singing off key and nobody would notice. This was something that actually upset them to the extent that they felt that they were artistically in a quagmire, they were stagnant, they were not making any kind of progress at all, and they felt that they could do much better in terms of musical

development by working in the recording studio producing albums, rather than playing to crowds that couldn't hear them.

So, on one hand they had the prospect of the artistic side of things, which was important to each of them, particularly George Harrison. George was a very meticulous – he was the guy who would tune up not only his own guitar at the last minute, but tune up the other boys' instruments as well. George and John were first to say, 'We really can't go on like this,' but George had another reason; he had this terrible fear of flying. He hated flying. Every single flight was a white-knuckle ride, from George's point of view.

But most important, though, was the whole business of security. In 1966 we faced terrible death-threat situations. Not just from America. We had also been over to Japan, and in Tokyo an extremist faction of students, who today we would call terrorists, made death threats to the Beatles if they dared to play in the Budokan. The students reckoned they had no right to play in a place that was reserved for sacred, serious sporting tournaments.

We did five consecutive shows there, and with a huge military and police security force guarding us all the while. To an extent, the Beatles were unaware of what was going on, although they couldn't understand why there were quite so many armed policemen en route from the Tokyo Hilton hotel to the Budokan venue. Inside, there were all these sort of photographers with these huge lenses on, but what the Beatles didn't know was that half of these people were not photographers at all, but security forces checking the place out for snipers.

Q And after all that, the next stop was Manila…

That's right, so it was out of the frying pan into the fire.

In Manila, an incident got totally out of hand. Imelda Marcos, the first lady, the wife of President Ferdinand Marcos, invited the Beatles to join her at the Malacañang Palace. Now, the way we

got this was a sort of just-drop- in-and-see-her kind of informal invitation, and it was very quickly rejected on the grounds that there were two shows that day, huge outdoor shows, and the Beatles wanted to get to the gig, sort themselves out at this enormous football stadium, and were not really very keen anyway on those sorts of occasions. And to go to a palace just before a gig like this wouldn't have been the right preparation, so Brian Epstein, on their behalf, politely declined the invitation.

Now, the local official obviously feared for his very life and didn't dare to go back to the Palace to tell Imelda they are not coming. Therefore, Brian's response was never relayed back to the first lady or her all-powerful husband, but what did come out on the television news, which Brian Epstein and myself saw later on back at our hotel, suddenly showed pictures of the Palace and a commentary that talked of this formal occasion where 300 of the children of the aristocracy of Manila were lined up to sit down to a very formal lunch with the Beatles, and all the place cards had been set out and everything, and there's Mrs Marcos saying, 'We can't wait any longer for them,' and pictures of the place cards being removed. Brian and I suddenly realised that far from being a drop-in-and-see-me thing, this had been a massive formal occasion, and it looked like they'd snubbed the First Lady and, more importantly, hundreds of kids.

So it was damage limitation time, if you like. The first thing I did was to get hold of the local television news people and ask them get around to the hotel and do an interview with Brian Epstein so he could give our side of the story. Brian and I drafted out something that he should say, explaining that the Beatles hadn't even known about it.

When it was broadcast later in the evening, the sound was perfect right up to the introduction of this recorded interview. Suddenly, you could not hear a word of what Brian said. I kept a sound recording of it myself for many years – I have still got

it locked away – and you can't make out what was being said. It was deliberately sabotaged. From that moment, there was a whole barrage of hatred against the Beatles amongst the public. It was obviously a propaganda thing.

Immediately, we were hindered in every possible way. Police security and forces were withdrawn entirely, and it was made very difficult for us to move around the place, to get away from the concert venue that night even. They even made it difficult to leave the country. The pettiness was incredible; they went as far as to switch off the airport escalators. Our whole departure was made as difficult as possible.

When the Beatles themselves arrived at the airport to join us, they were jostled and pushed around by a mob of people that appeared from nowhere, who were professionally muggers, all carrying cudgels and weaponry of one kind of another and actually firing pistols off into the air. We all tried to surround the Beatles as far as possible and we ran the gauntlet out to the aircraft. I have never felt more relieved to leave a place, and neither had the four Beatles.

So, all these things combined to make it impossible for the Beatles to continue touring. Right up until the end, however, there was no statement from the Brian Epstein Organisation at any stage to say that touring was over. Brian confidently expected that he would one day manage to get his boys back on the stage. He had actually pencilled out a UK tour that never did take place, but they announced it to me on a one-to-one basis immediately after the final concert, which was in San Francisco at the end of August in 1966. We all got back onto our charter aircraft to fly back down the Californian coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and George Harrison sank down into the seat next to me on the plane and said, 'Well, that's it. I'm not a Beatle any more.'

Now, that would have been a sensational headline worldwide, except that what he actually meant was that he didn't have to go

through that Beatlemania thing ever again. The touring was over for them. They were not doing it anymore.

Q I suppose the difficult thing was that there were no rules to follow where the Beatles where concerned. There'd never been anything quite like it before. You were making it up as you went along! There must have been hitches and glitches…
That's right. There had certainly never been anything like Beatlemania before. Brian Epstein has been quite strongly criticised for his lack of business acumen in the area of merchandising, for example, but then there was no precedent. The only thing anywhere near it in previous times had been Walt Disney merchandising, but nothing in the rock and roll world at all. So, yes, the Beatles sadly missed out on millions and millions of dollars that they could have earned from merchandising and never did, but I have to say in Epstein's defence that part of the policy from the very beginning – and I was in on the meetings where the Beatles themselves talked about this – was that they did not wish to make money out of peripheral things like selling souvenirs. They made a very strong point of saying that the fan club itself should not ever be a merchandising outfit, a profit making operation, but should be a source of information.

So it became part of my duty, really, as the press officer for those six years, through and beyond Beatlemania, to supervise the running of that fan club as a source of information, not as a shop to sell merchandise. Brian was eventually pushed into making merchandising agreements, and yes, they were seriously detrimental to the Beatles in that those who did the producing and selling of the goods made far more money than the Beatles, so there was some sort of imbalance there, but there was never any intention on the Beatles' part to make money in that way, anyway.

I suppose there were hitches and glitches and hiccups and whatever you want to call them when it came to the major tours.

Most of the problems were to do with people letting us down, or being unprepared – in security, in sound systems, in lighting, and everything else. There was one occasion where the staging facilities were so bad that, in the case of rain, all the electrical equipment on the stage there would have been live. Never mind Tokyo or Manila or Memphis, Tennessee, that stage was in itself a death trap. It did rain. It was a wet evening, and if anybody had actually touched the microphones they would have risked killing themselves.

There was an awful lot like that where you could make very strong criticism of the background organisation. I have got to say, though, that's with the huge benefit of hindsight. Today they have touring entourages of sixty people, sound experts, catering people, and all the rest. In our day what we did was to carry the four Beatles, two road managers, a driver, and that was about the sum of it.

The local promoter would then liaise with the local police force, whether this was in Cheltenham or Chicago. The local police force would do what they thought was necessary, and in a lot of cases they underachieved, because they had nothing to go by. They had no previous experience of handling such huge crowd scenes in the world of rock and roll.

Q How important were the *Ed Sullivan Show* appearances in cracking the US?

The success in America was achieved by contributions in a number of different areas. 73 million people watched the Beatles on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, the most important show in America. That was a record television audience. Now, you can't ignore that! And that was a Sunday night audience, if you see what I mean, not a kid's television audience. Therefore, for the first time the Beatles were exposed in America, not only to their millions of fans, but also to the parents of those fans, the older generations, who actually accepted the Beatles partly because of the *Ed Sullivan*

Show appearances: if they are good for Ed Sullivan, they are good enough for us!

So it spread their popularity beyond the normal pop-record-buying teeny bopper public of America. The teeny bopper public of America had already been adequately covered in the lead-up, I think, by our use of magazines such as *Sixteen* Magazine, which was the biggest selling of them all. We concentrated our efforts before the 1964 tour in servicing both *Sixteen* and its competitors with an ample supply of new photographs, specially written packaged feature articles, and material generally that would give them maximum editorial coverage in America in the lead-up to the tour, but that concentrated mainly in the teen market area. That was very important, but it was the *Ed Sullivan Show* that added the extra dimension.

So it was a combination of things. Capital Records also spent unusual amounts of promotional money on gimmicky things like Beatles wigs. They had executives going round the place in Beatles wigs and waving flags and posters, and they certainly provided posters and banners for the kids to wave at the airport at New York when the Beatles first arrived in February 1964. So it was a concentrated effort from all areas, but it was all directed at different parts of the market, and that's what was crucial to the success.

Q How do you view what Brian Epstein did with the group?

I think that the handful of us in the inner circle of business associates, professional aides – call us what you will – that surrounded the Beatles were in a unique position because we were totally inexperienced ourselves. Brian Epstein was and so was I, but in time Brian Epstein's management organisation was probably one of the most complete and comprehensive of its kind anywhere in the world, not just for the Beatles, but for the other artists that we represented.

He charged a high price; he took 25% from his artists, which meant that he was earning more than any individual Beatle, but he gave such a comprehensive service. The organisation had got all the right people doing the right jobs, from the legal side of things to the staging of shows and all the rest of it, and these things did not come cheaply. So he was asking a high price of the Beatles, but also giving a lot.

Q It struck me that many of the people who surrounded the group were Liverpudlians.

Yes, there were many people they had known from the very start, people they trusted, from their early days in Liverpool. That meant that there was a great bond between them, this group of exiled Scousers going round the world. And the Beatles never turned on them or their management. What they did, certainly in the earlier days, was to draw what they could from those around them, particularly in the case of George Martin, their record producer. They sucked him dry of his knowledge about the technical possibilities of a recording studio. He began as the guy in total control and gradually they ended up working as a team, if you like. He was certainly the fifth Beatle when it came to the recording side of things. They worked closely together, but they used his knowledge to plan their musical destinies.

Q But the relationship with Brian must have changed when they finished touring…

Well, that's right. From then on they were determined to control their own professional destiny, not just in songwriting or in recording, but in everything else that they did. Now, that meant that Brian Epstein lost a lot professional influence over the Beatles. There was never any falling-out with Brian on a personal level. He began as a good friend of theirs back home in Liverpool and he retained that close bond with them all the way through, but at

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the same time, they needed his management skills less and less. They needed him less as a mentor because they were doing it all themselves.

It is well known that before Brian Epstein's tragic and premature death in 1967 they had already planned the setting up of a business called Apple Corps. Apple was going to be their self-management operation. Now, whether or not Brian Epstein would ever have had any say in the running of Apple, we will never know, but I would suggest that he would never have been more than a figurehead, a non-executive figurehead, a sleeping partner, whatever you want to call it. They didn't need a big set-up of management around them any more than they needed the advice of a recording manager or record producer. They would almost tell their producer what they wanted of him and they would do the same with their management.

But there was no falling out on a personal basis. They remained very friendly with Brian Epstein, but on the other hand they sure as hell recognised his great personal weaknesses. For one reason or another, at that time he was descending into an absolute quagmire of drink and prescribed drugs.

The Beatles were his hobby as well as his business and he was losing the control that he had once had over them. He was losing the job, if you like. He wasn't losing them as friends. The Fab Four were still there for him, and vice versa, but his professional influence was weakening.

Q Tell me about Brian.

Brian Epstein was a fairly sad figure as a person. He was, as we all know, gay. His sexual preferences were somewhat – what can I call it? He wasn't even a straight gay – can I put it that way? Therefore, he wasn't accepted within the community in which he attempted to mix. What I am trying to say is that he was a very lonely man, who never did have – and this is the crucial thing – never did have

any long-term relationship with anybody and had no trustworthy close friends.

He used to hold these gigantic show-business parties with the Beatles as the main guests and Cilla Black and some of his other artists in attendance, and he got great satisfaction with those, but that was kind of surrounding himself with people as a need

All very sad.

Q Then, shortly after Brian's death, came the *Magical Mystery Tour*. Were you involved in that, particularly?

Yes, I was. That was the last production that they ever did that really had their joint enthusiasm, as a group.

Now, a lot of people at the time thought that Paul McCartney was being very callous in forcing the group to go back to work within a few days after Brian Epstein's death and funeral. In fact, if Paul had not pushed them into working at that time, I believe that they might well have gone off to India with their new-found little giggling guru, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, with whom they wanted to study transcendental meditation. George, in particular, had got the bug. The others went along partly for the ride.

They might well have gone to India, and as Paul actually said to me at the time, if they had done that I doubt if the Beatles would ever have come together again as a working band. They were quite strong words, but I could see exactly what he meant. They needed to stay together then because they were already at that time starting to go off in their various separate directions.

They were still interested in producing something like *Magical Mystery Tour*, because it was different, with its comedy angle. At the same time, they had an enormous amount of individual stuff in their heads that they wanted to use and couldn't in the context of the Beatles. The Fab Four had done everything that it could do. It was now producing exceptionally strong album material and it needed some kind of new direction entirely. That new direction

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would have meant, and it happened in the end, George going off in his direction doing his thing, Paul doing his thing, and John doing his thing, et cetera.

I watched the Beatles disintegrate as a band, as a group, over those four years, from 1966 onwards, I would say. By 1967 they were all tugging at the lead, as it were, tugging at the reins to go off on their own ways, so they needed something like *Magical Mystery Tour* to keep them together, and it was a fun thing. Some people would say it was stupid, too, because there were very few professionally trained, professionally qualified people in charge of that production. It was the first project that the Beatles did on their own.

It was the prelude, if you like, to all things Apple. That was about to come. They were into a new era of their career, and they reckoned they could make a film just as easily as they could record an album or do a concert, so they did the film. A lot of people say it was ahead of its time, although it was written off by many critics as being just crazy – but it had an awful lot of Monty Python-type elements in it, and Monty Python was something that was still years ahead.

It could have done with a great deal of professional tightening-up, perhaps, but, let's face it, it would have lost of lot of the spontaneity. I know for a fact that Paul McCartney in particular wanted *Magical Mystery Tour* to be a major cinema success, a theatrical success. He hoped against hope that it would be the beginning of a big new film career for the Beatles, which would have seen him as Executive Producer of future movie productions. That, of course, never came to pass. In fact, he lost whatever credibility he had as a producer, of movies at any rate, at that time, I think, and struggled very hard to get back into the movie world himself after that. But I think that from the Beatles point of view it was their last big achievement.

Critics are now going to tell me I don't know what I'm talking about, that they recorded some very good stuff after that in the

way of albums. Yes, they did, of course, but I still believe that, as the Beatles on record, they had passed their best by then.

Q Do you have a favourite memory of working with them? One special moment above all others?

I'd say it was the Shea Stadium concert in the USA in 1965, actually.

Working with the Beatles was a life of heaven and hell because the Beatles could be demons on the one hand and gods on the other. It could be wonderful and not so wonderful. I have to say, though, that the good times far outweighed the bad.

But the high spot of the whole six years I worked for them has to be a spine-tingling occasion in New York in the vastness of Shea Stadium, which seated 56,000 fans, in the summer of 1965. It was the first show that the Beatles gave at that venue. You had 56,000 fans in stands around this enormous baseball field. You had the Beatles out in the middle of this field on a makeshift stage.

Now, the Beatles were used to playing places like the Cavern Club, where their fans were right down in front of them, here, and they could actually lean over and touch them or take a cigarette from them. From there they progressed to slightly larger places, cinemas and theatres, where the first row would be a few yards in front of them. They had gone from that to Shea Stadium, where they were in the middle of a baseball field.

The only way they could give a live performance in that environment was to do everything twice as large as life, and that they did. All their facial expressions, everything, was exaggerated. John used an electric organ that he had never used before and he exaggerated. He went up and down with his elbow on the keyboard like this, doing his Jerry Lee Lewis impression.

There is – thank goodness – there is movie footage of the Beatles at Shea Stadium, and the close-ups on them show them really working their arses off to get themselves across and communicate

with 56,000 people, which they achieved. To me, it wasn't the greatest musical experience of my time with the Beatles, of course, but for sheer excitement it brought a tingle to my spine, and when I think back to it now, that has to be the most amazing experience of my entire time with them. Not musical greatness, but certainly just a fantastic electrifying experience – Beatles at Shea Stadium, 1965.

Q Were you sad to leave?

I considered that for six years I had been part of the greatest phenomenon of the show business world and had worked within the inner circle of the Beatles, and of course, when that era came to an end, there was sadness about it, but I also recognised that I had been part of the whole Beatlemania situation and that was no longer around.

The era had gone. The Beatles were no longer the Fab Four. They were individual people; there was Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Ringo Starr, George Harrison going out to do their separate things, and therefore there was no sadness in the fact that all that was over, because that had done everything that it could as a band. It had been a memorable part of history, but I was ready to move on just as much as they were.

Q And your favourite Beatle album, Tony?

Well, I am not going to say the most popular choice, which is *Sgt. Pepper's*, because I think that was just a little bit over-indulgent, a bit over the top, a bit over-waxed, over-cooked.

No, I prefer my Beatles music much more raw than that, if you like, and so mainly I prefer the earliest stuff. Although there was an engaging amateurishness about it, *Sgt. Pepper's* was too contrived, although it was natural that it should go that direction. After they came off the road, all eyes were upon this first product of their studio era, and the Beatles had to produce something not

just for their millions of fans, but something strong enough to impress their peers, like the Rolling Stones and the Beach Boys. So I think *Sgt. Pepper's* wasn't so much for the fans, but to make quite sure the business – their rivals, their competitors, their colleagues in the music world – knew and could see and hear the progress they'd made.

So no, I prefer them when they weren't quite so indulgent, and my favourite album has to be *Revolver*. *Revolver* had a little bit of something for everybody. There's *Eleanor Rigby* at one end of the spectrum and *Yellow Submarine* at the other.

Q Of course, you coined the phrase didn't you, the Fab Four. How did that come about?

I am credited with having invented this phrase, the Fab Four. Yes, it came about through me using a longer version of that, the Fabulous Foursome, in an early album-sleeve note that I wrote for one of the Beatles records. I was then writing a press release shortly afterwards, and looking at this album sleeve, and I thought, 'Oh yes, I'll use that again – Fabulous Foursome.' Then I thought that sounded too pompous, a bit high-falutin'. The Fab Four – that will do! To my amazement it caught on. The media immediately used it as often as they were using the word Beatlemania, and both things have lived on to this day. Everybody still today talks about the Fab Four, more than 40 years later.

Norman Smith

It's a fair bet that the name Norman Smith wouldn't mean much to a fair proportion of Beatle fans. However, mention the name 'Hurricane' Smith to pop music listeners of a certain vintage and it'll ring bells. They might need a little prompting, but eventually they'd come up with the names of the sizeable hits he chalked up in the early seventies. They were, to save you valuable Google time, *Don't Let It Die*, *Oh, Babe What Would You Say* and *Who Was It?*

Norman and 'Hurricane' are, of course, the same man, but before the latter embarked on his fairly short but nicely successful career as a pop star, the former had already played his part in making rock history by engineering all of the Beatles' earliest records.

Working alongside George Martin at Abbey Road Studios, Smith took a talented but raw group and helped them develop the distinctive, powerful sound which helped to sell millions of Beatles records. At nearly 40, Smith was nearly twice the age of the members of the group, but that didn't stop him from building

a solid working relationship with them. John Lennon, in his own inimitable way, nicknamed him 'Normal'.

The last Beatle album that Norman Smith worked on was *Rubber Soul* in 1965. Although as he says in the interview that follows that he had detected a change in them, and that working with the Beatles was no longer as much fun as it had previously been, it was more than anything his promotion to producer by EMI that persuaded him to move on. And move on he did, to play a prominent role as producer on many records by many artists, including, most notably perhaps, Pink Floyd.

Smith produced the first three ground-breaking Pink Floyd albums: *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, *A Saucerful of Secrets* and *Ummagumma*. He also produced *S.F. Sorrow*, an album by the Pretty Things which is generally regarded as one rock music's first concept albums.

Before that, though, there was the small matter of eight Beatle singles and their B-sides, plus six Beatle albums.

Q What kind of guys were the Beatles when you first met them? Were they easy to work with?

I first saw them at an artist test. Their manager, Brain Epstein, had been turned down by other companies, so he fixed up an artist test with us. I was sitting waiting for them to come in for an afternoon session. An assistant and a sound engineer would usually be present at these artist tests, so when George Martin arrived, I thought we might be in for something special.

These four guys then walked in. I'd never seen anything quite like their hairstyles – they all looked the same. I went down the steps to number-two studio from the control room and introduced myself, and they introduced themselves to me as George, John, Paul, and Pete. At this point, their accent was strong Liverpudlian, and I had a soft spot for Liverpudlian humour. I set them up in the studio with mikes and their tiny amplifiers. I then went

upstairs to the control room and opened up the faders and mikes, and I couldn't believe the noise that was coming out of it. It was the strangest noise because of their rubbish equipment. I called a technical engineer, complete with a soldering iron, to try and sort out the sound. I had to rob one of the echo chambers in the end and use that equipment!

They started to perform, and the first thing they did was *Besame Mucho*, which is an old movie song. I can tell you that there was no indication at all of their songwriting ability. They were not impressive at all, but I liked them and their humour was starting to come out, particularly Paul and John. George was a bit of an introvert. George Martin said I'd better bring them up to the control room, and he then started to address them and tell them what he was looking for, how they were going to be treated, and explained about head arrangements and the rest

Click the above photo for a video link

Producer Norman Smith recalls working with the Beatles in the studio.

of it. I recommended certain equipment, including Pete Best's cymbals.

Well, this sort of schoolmaster's talk went on for about 20 minutes, and then George asked them if there was anything they wanted to say to us or anything they didn't like. They were silent for a bit and just looked us up and down, and then George Harrison said to George Martin, 'Well, I don't like your tie.'

I nearly fell off my chair laughing; tears were running down my face. The Beatles left the control room and George Martin asked me what I thought of them. I said, 'I've never seen anything like these guys. What we've heard today isn't good, but I think we should sign them. I think they have much more to come.' George Martin then said he'd think about it.

That was the end of the first meeting with the Beatles. They were eventually signed and their first session was booked. They were going to start with a song called *Love Me Do*. This time, George Martin's assistant turned up instead. This kind of music was not George Martin's bag; he wasn't interested in rock and guitar groups. Ron Richards turned up and it was left to us to produce *Love Me Do*.

It didn't turn out too well, I'm afraid, and that was mainly because of the arrangement. Ron Richards postponed the session, and it was two or three weeks later before they came in again. Ron Richards had reported back to George Martin saying that Pete Best had to go, as his drumming was not good enough. I didn't agree. It wasn't how he was playing, but what he was playing, in my opinion, but I was just a sound engineer, nothing to do with production at that time, so they got together and said Pete had to go.

The other three guys had seen and knew Ringo Starr. They liked him and were ready for a new drummer. And there was something else. Pete Best was also the best-looking guy in the band, and he attracted all the female attention. The other guys didn't like

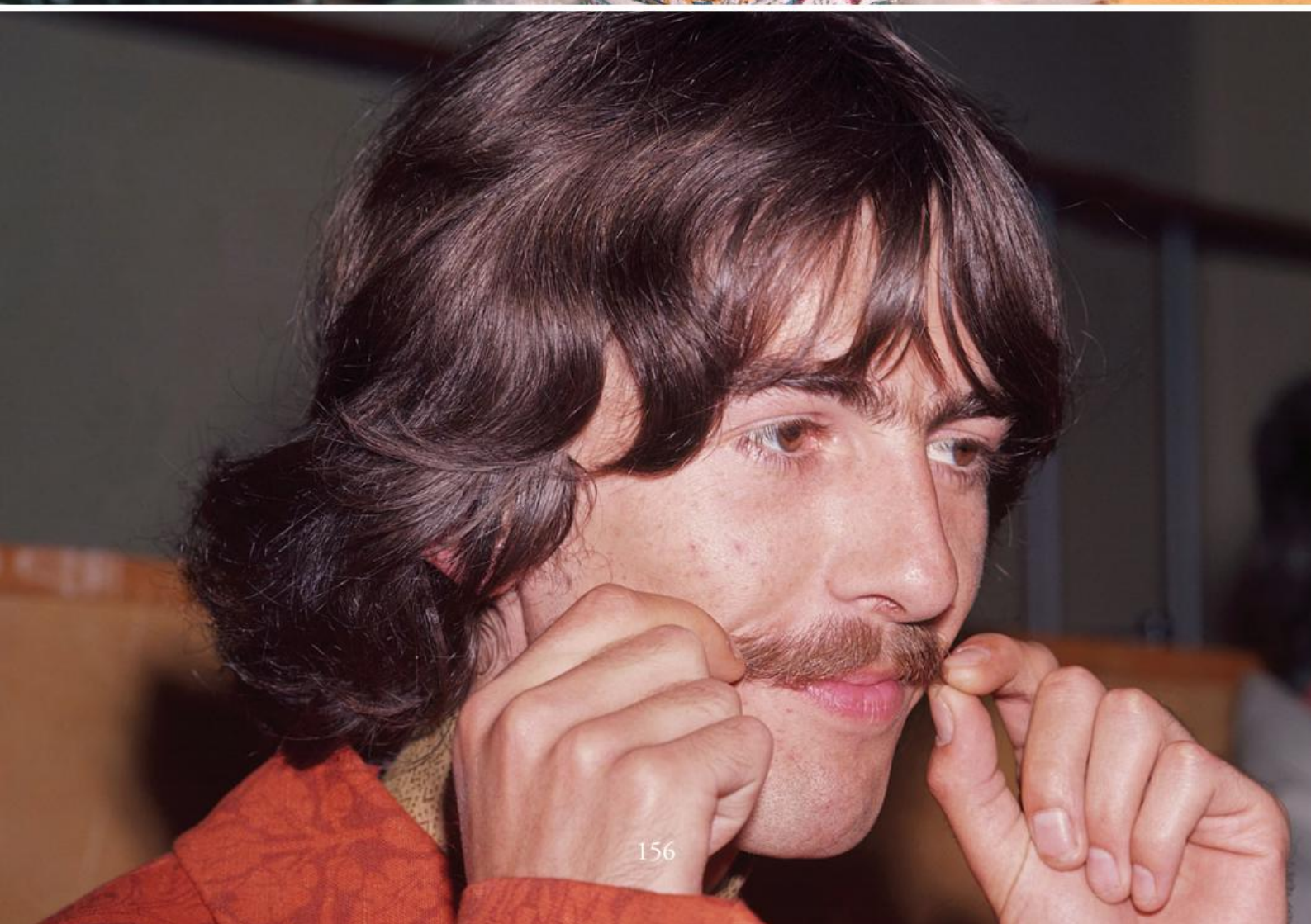
that too much. I think this, and the fact that they liked Ringo, contributed to what happened next, which was, as we all know, that Pete Best was sacked.

So Ringo became a Beatle and we did *Love Me Do* again, this time with both Ron Richards and George Martin present. But I'm afraid that Ringo's drumming was not that impressive. I was dying to say my piece about the arrangement, but I thought I had better keep out of it, so a session drummer, Andy White, was brought in to play on the record. Andy had listened to the head arrangements and started playing exactly how I thought it should be played. That's how the master was achieved, with Andy playing the drums for the single *Love Me Do*. It got to about number 16 in the charts, I think.

Q And then came the first album?

That's right. We then had to record the Beatles' first LP, which we started and finished in a day, in three sessions – ten till one, two till five, and seven until ten o'clock. Thirteen tracks in one day! The last track we recorded was *Twist and Shout*, a loud powerful rock arrangement of an Isley Brothers song, with John on lead vocal. The trouble was his voice was absolutely shattered by this time.

That grand piano in studio number two at Abbey Road had on it a big confectionary jar filled with Hacks, the throat sweets. Funnily enough, by the side of the jar were Peter Stuyvesent cigarettes, which they smoked incessantly during the day. I don't know whether the Hacks were there to cancel out the result of the smoking or help with the singing! Anyway, we came to do *Twist and Shout* and I thought we've got to get this in one take, because John's voice will never last for a second. And we did, exactly as you hear it now on the record. It's one of their greatest performances. And that's a little story from the recording of the first album.



Q One take! It's amazing to think of now, isn't it?
Oh, absolutely. And one day for the whole album. Other albums and groups took a year to produce. When I was with Pink Floyd it took a while to produce albums with them, and even mine was a damn sight more difficult! But anyway, the next single was *Please Please Me*, which went to number one, and from then on Beatlemania really started.

Q From the first album onwards, were recording methods changing?
Well, the main difference was that when I started recording, records were in straight mono, and bands had to sing, perform, and play, but then twin, four, and eight-track came along. The big improvement was that I was able to separate the components of the song – the vocals, the guitars, the drums, et cetera, and remix it later and give each track its own treatment. For instance, with four-track, I could bump down tracks and remix them, thereby leaving tracks free. You could bump down like that until you had quite a large number of tracks at your disposal.

There were also things like limiters and compressors that came in, but I didn't like using those because you could always hear them working in the songs, so I tried to avoid them. There was also better equalisation – which is tone control – but there were not many more technological advances than that, really.

Q So would you say the sound they achieved was less to do with the recording techniques and more to do with the group itself?
Yes. I had a sound in my head that I wanted to achieve. When you go to a concert, you will hear a mixture of direct sound and ambience, or throw-back, which is unique to that that theatre or concert hall. In the same way, I had a sound in my head that I wanted to translate onto tape. I set the Beatles up in the studio

in a certain way. You were supposed to follow a company policy of screening and fading microphones to improve separation, but I didn't like that. I knew it was better for the group to feel closer together.

Once they and I were successfully established, I thought I could do what I liked. I would go down into the studio area and tell them they could set whatever levels they liked on their guitars and equipment, whatever they were happy with themselves. Unlike other engineers, I let them do that. I would stand at the back and try and get this sound down, a mixture of them and what was coming back from the studio, and then I would place the mikes accordingly, which was sometimes a long way away. Sometimes I used a bit of echo on their voices, but that's how I developed that sound of the Beatles.

Q I think *Rubber Soul* has a fantastic sound; did you particularly enjoy recording that album? Is it among your favourites?

I have mixed feelings about *Rubber Soul*. Something seemed to happen to them between the recording of *Help!* – that was the previous album – and the recording of *Rubber Soul*. For a start, there was the Indian-music infiltration of George Harrison, under the guru influence of you-know-who. But they had all changed. Up until *Rubber Soul*, we were a happy family, very tight, all six of us. George Martin used to say he was the fifth Beatle and I was the sixth, but I used to reverse it and say I was the fifth Beatles and that George was the sixth.

That's the sort of relationship we had up until they came in to start *Rubber Soul*, where I noticed a distinct change which I did not like one little bit. There were big personality changes, particularly in Paul and John. They looked different to start with, and they acted differently; the nice family feel had gone. Bickering, arguing, and taking much longer to do tracks. There was the start

of a distinctive dislike growing between them, which upset me terribly.

Fortunately, I was able to get out of it if I wanted because the offer to become a producer came soon after we'd started *Rubber Soul*. It was good timing for me, as I didn't like what was going on. I told Epstein and George Martin about the offer and that I wanted out. That caused great disappointment and upset amongst the boys, and they went out to a shop in New Bond Street and bought me a gold carriage clock, inscribed to me from them. It almost brought me to tears, so I agreed to continue and finish the *Rubber Soul* album, but I told them that after that I wouldn't carry on. I needed to get on with my new job as a producer.

So, as I said, there were mixed feelings. There was enjoyment of the sounds I'd produced, which were quite impressive, but disappointment and upset because the relationship had gone a little sour. I could see then that it was the beginning of the end of the group, which upset me terribly. *Sgt. Pepper's* temporarily brought them back together, but the split-up was still inevitable. *Rubber Soul* was a mixture. I wouldn't say it was my favourite album. All of them were.

Q Was there ever a song you really weren't sure about?

There was one song about which I was a bit iffy. There used to be handwritten lyrics on music stands in front of the mikes for Paul and John to use to refresh their memories. I set them up on this particular session, and I went down later to check the positioning, and by this time they had already put lyrics on the music stand. I had a look, and it said, 'She loves you, yeah-yeah-yeah/She loves you, yeah-yeah-yeah'. I thought, 'Well, this is going to be a funny sort of song!' All the same, I was intrigued. Once they started singing, of course, it all came to life. Wonderful. There was no one song or album that was my favourite. They all were.

Q How important do you consider your contribution to the Beatles' work? Do you think George Martin should have acknowledged it more?

Well, I know what I did to create the sound for the Beatles. I know how much the boys appreciated what I did for them. All I can say is that George Martin not wishing to share the kudos speaks for itself.

Geoffrey Ellis

If Geoffrey Ellis hadn't been friendly with Brian Epstein, it's highly likely that he would have spent his working life in the insurance industry. He'd moved to New York in 1958 as an executive for the Royal Life Insurance Company, and was happy and settled until Epstein called him and asked him to return to London to work for his rapidly expanding NEMS business empire.

Ellis had been a friend of Epstein's in Liverpool. The two shared a love of music and the theatre; it was at the Royal Court Theatre that the two men had first met. Having completed his studies at Oxford University and gained a degree in law, the young Ellis had seemed destined for a career at the bar until the opportunity arose to live and work in the US.

As Ellis himself acknowledges, he wasn't exactly an obvious candidate for a life in the pop business. He didn't even enjoy that kind of music, being more a lover of opera and classical music, but Brian Epstein could be enormously persuasive, and anyway it was Geoffrey's considerable organisational and legal skills that NEMS

needed. The move was a success for all concerned. By the end of 1964 Ellis had been made a senior executive, and during 1965 he was given a directorship.

So it was that Geoffrey Ellis found himself placed at the centre of the Beatle whirlwind and was able to see at close hand the crazy days of Beatlemania and beyond. As the interview you're about to read reveals, his was a slightly different perspective. He was somewhat older than the group and refused to be drawn into the chemical excesses which were a hallmark of the mid-to-late sixties. Geoffrey's description of a party at John Lennon's new house in Surrey has him retiring early because of an early start the following morning and being amazed to wake and find Kenny Everett in the next bed. He also remembers with some disapproval an unfortunate incident with their New York lawyer's shoe…

Geoffrey Ellis continued his successful career post-Beatles, most notably at DJM Music, where one of his most famous charges was Elton John.

Q How did you first become involved with the Beatles and the music industry, Geoffrey?

I was a good friend of Brian Epstein, and he asked me to come and help him in the administration and the management of the Beatles in October 1964. After Brian died a few years later I went to work with Dick James, who'd published the work of Lennon and McCartney and a lot of other people. One of the chaps that Dick published was a nice, pleasant, respectful, and respectable young man called Reginald Dwight, who later on changed his name to Elton John. I first became aware of Elton when I was working in administration in Dick James Music – DJM – the publishing company.

Elton would come in every week for his weekly advance. I was going to say handout, but it was advance, that started at about £10 a week, I think, and later on was increased to £15 pound a week.

He used to say hello and chat a little, and he was very pleasant. I formed a good impression of him. I was not particularly aware of his music at that time, as it wasn't part of my job to listen to music or go to gigs, but he clearly became extremely successful when he was published by Dick James Music. Subsequently, John Reid [Elton John's manager] asked me if I would come and join his management company, John Reid Enterprises, which managed Elton John as well as his other artists.

Q What kind of outfit was DJM?

Dick James had started his own company up perhaps 10 years earlier, and his big break came when Brian Epstein came to him and did a deal with him to publish the music of Lennon and McCartney. Initially, Dick James was a bit dubious about how Lennon and McCartney would do, but they eventually set up

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Ex-Excutive Norman Smith describes working for Brian Epstein.

a joint company called Northern Songs Ltd. Dick was a sort of father figure to them. He talked a great deal, which irritated some people, but he did a lot of very shrewd deals indeed with the Beatles, and subsequently with Elton John and Bernie Taupin. He was also thoroughly honest.

When he saw what a big star Elton was going to become, Dick started a management company of his own, as Dick James Music had been previously purely a music-publishing company. He started a record company, too. All Elton's earlier records were on Dick James's own company, called This Record Co. Dick James built on Elton's success, but he did it all in a very upright, straightforward, successful way. I think that perhaps on Elton's part there was a little bit of resentment that DJM Records had made such a lot of money out of him, but then, as a generality, I would say that most pop artists rather resent the fact that people make a lot of money out of them.

In fact, not all of them enable the record companies-publishers to recoup expense which they've laid out for the artists' careers.

Q Brian Epstein approached you and asked you to help. How did you view the Beatles at that time? You were living in the States – did you really understand how big the Beatles were?
I was aware of the Beatles. I was living in America, working in an insurance company in New York, and I first heard of the Beatles when they were referred to in the press. I sometimes saw an English newspaper in America, and they started they going wild about the Beatles, managed by my old friend Brian Epstein, which surprised me very much because when I'd left England he appeared to have no interest whatsoever in pop music!

Brian was working for his father in their store in Liverpool, and he was in charge of record sales there. Then Brian came to New York to suss out the American scene with the thought of bringing the Beatles over to America, where he was sure they could be

a success, as the buzz from England had made its way into the American press. I was the only person Brian knew in New York, and so of course we got together and I showed him round the city. I didn't really know what he was doing, business-wise. He didn't talk to me about it then, but in fact he was seeing people like Ed Sullivan, who had the biggest TV show there was in America in those days. He was looking into the possibility of the Beatles coming over to America and making an appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, which of course they eventually very successfully did.

This was in 1963. Brian went back to England and came back to USA the following year, but this time he brought the Beatles with him, which caused a tremendous scene in New York. They went to stay at the Plaza Hotel, one of the grandest hotels in America, and the police had no idea that there was going to be a virtual riot outside the hotel when the Beatles arrived.

Brian called me from his suite in the Plaza, which sensibly was on another floor from that of the Beatles, and asked me to come over so we could go and have dinner. I did, and I had no difficulty in getting into the hotel, because I wasn't a teenager. The teenagers were rioting, and the police wouldn't allow them anywhere near the place! Brian took me to meet the Beatles in their suite. They were watching TV, which was showing footage of their own arrival, but they watched with the sound off while they listened to their records being played on the radio. Occasionally they went to the window and waved to the crowds outside. It was a surreal scene, certainly for me.

Actually, George Harrison was not in their suite because he was feeling ill, and there was even some doubt as to whether he would be able to appear at all. He was being tended to by his sister, who lived in America and who had come across to see him. Brian and I left for dinner, and as we were going out of the suite, one of his staff handed him an envelope and said that it might be helpful

to him. It was addressed to the Beatles, care of Mr Brian Epstein at the Plaza. We went over to have dinner at the Four Seasons restaurant, which at that time was one of the top eating places in New York, and Brian handed this letter to the Maitre d'. In fact, it was an invitation from the Four Seasons for the Beatles to go and have dinner there as their guests. The Maitre d' said, 'But this is for the Beatles,' and Brian replied, 'Well, I'm their manager and we accept your kind invitation.' So he and I had a free dinner at the Four Seasons, courtesy of the Beatles.

That was Beatles' first trip to America, but they came back and toured very successfully, of course, during the next few years, and eventually Brian asked if I would like to go and work for him at his offices in London. I must admit I had some doubts because I was in a secure position at the insurance company in New York and was doing okay there. One never knew what was going to happen in showbiz, and certainly not with pop music, about which I knew absolutely nothing. But after giving it some serious thought, I accepted Brian's offer. I moved back to Britain and was instantly thrust into the world of pop music.

Q Did you go on tour with band?

It was never part of my own job to go on tour with the Beatles, though I saw them perform from time to time both in England and in the States. It was a pretty hair-raising experience on occasion. I recall that the first time I saw them, before I was working for Brian, in fact, was in New York when he had negotiated for them to appear in Carnegie Hall, the very prestigious venue in New York which staged large and very splendid classical music concerts.

A number of us had seats behind the band, looking out at the audience, but really one could hardly hear a note the Beatles were playing because the shouting and screaming from the audience was absolutely extraordinary. Brian had consciously and deliberately

decided to play Carnegie Hall because it was the most prestigious venue, although his local promoter had wanted a much bigger venue for them.

The next time I saw them was at Forest Hills Stadium, which was a much larger venue, though not as big as some of the enormous places they subsequently appeared in. I went with a friend and the audience were very excited before the Beatles arrived. The Beatles very sensibly came by helicopter because the roads were all snarled up with crowds getting there. It was an extraordinary experience, because when they landed the audience stood up, looked up, and raised their arms, and it seemed for all the world like they were worshiping gods that had descended upon them.

The performance was great, as always, the screaming was loud, as always. After the show as I was walking away – as we had not come by helicopter, unfortunately! – we were walking to our car and some of the kids that were leaving the show heard me speaking and said, 'Oh, he's British! He's British!' And such was the excitement about the Beatles at that stage that they were really quite excited to see an Englishman there. I thought that if I'd told them that I had actually met the Beatles they might have torn my clothes off! However, we made it home safely.

Q Tell me about NEMS Enterprises, Brian's management company.

Well, at first sight NEMS Enterprises did appear to be rather amateur, I suppose, although I think that's possibly a bit unfair because everyone was working really hard, so let's say it was lacking in organisation. Everyone was very enthusiastic, though, which made up for it. I don't believe that any great errors were made in promotion or in contractual relationships. No, it worked very well, although there was no great definition of people's roles. It was fine; it was very interesting to work there.

Q What was your role in the company?

Brian invited me to become, as he termed it, Chief Administrative Executive. It was a title which I never used at all, but he subsequently made me director of the company, which was all one needed really.

Q What did you make of Brian's management style?

Brian was a very hands-on manager. Don't forget, he was also their greatest fan. He had their interests at heart in every conceivable respect. People have said that he was in love with John Lennon, which personally I doubt, and of course there's no way now to prove it one way or the other. However, whatever his feelings for them as individuals, I don't think that affected his respect for their talent, his urge to make them successful, or his style of management. He went with them on tour everywhere, he discussed with them deals that he was making for them on their behalf, and he planned tours with their full knowledge. They were his whole life, really.

Q What about the other artists that Brian represented?

There was something of a problem in that he and the Beatles were so successful that a number of other pop artists at the time wanted to be managed by Brian, which was fine because he was interested in expanding his empire. To that end he did sign up a number of artists, perhaps the best known of whom was Cilla Black.

Cilla was from Liverpool, too, and he nurtured her and her career, although she often felt that he was looking after the Beatles exclusively to the her detriment, which can't have exactly been true, because look where she is now. She wouldn't be there had it not been for Brian Epstien's initial management. Occasionally, they would have big rows and she would accuse him of not caring about her or her career, but they would always kiss and make up. They were very fond of each other, I've no doubt about that at all.

There were others in the Epstein stable, of course. There was Gerry Marsden from Gerry and the Pacemakers, and Gerry is still going strong. There was Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas. Billy has had the subsequent career which he might not have had were it not for the early nurturing by Brian. There were others who benefited, too.

Q How was the working relationship between Brian and the Beatles?

There were very few occasions that I can recall where the Beatles had any serious differences with Brian. I believe they did appreciate all he did for them and they were absolutely dumbstruck by his premature and sad death in 1967. Obviously, they had minor differences, such as things like, 'We don't want to go there,' or 'I think this song is wrong for that performance,' but overall they had a very solid relationship. I have no doubt whatever of that.

Brian was a trailblazer in that style of very personal management. Pop music was revolutionised by the Beatles, and this inevitably led to the need for very strong, personal management, and I would suggest that there have been a number of subsequent managers who have modelled themselves on Brian, or who have certainly had his personal methods in mind when nurturing their own artists.

My own role was to have virtually nothing to with the artistic side, but there was so much that needed to done where contracts where concerned. Brian would negotiate a contract and then it would appear and it would need to be fine-tuned before it was finalised and signed. This was part of my role. Brian also didn't spend much time in the NEMS office, so somebody had to be there to run the office and to organise all the everyday ordinary office things like salaries, holidays, rents, and deal with any personnel difficulties. This was my role.

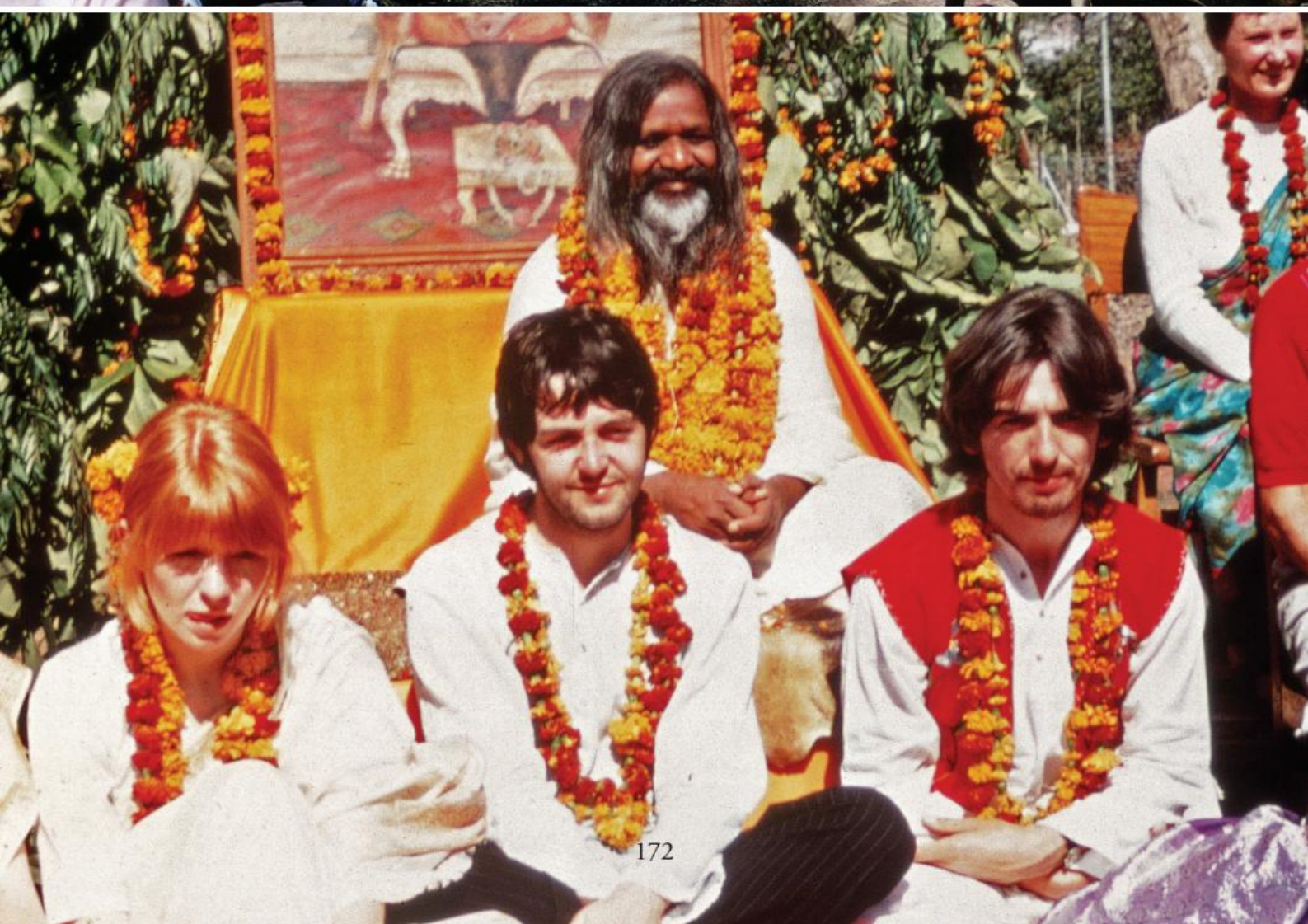
Q Any idea what the boys made of you?

I really don't know what the Beatles thought of me. The contact I did have with them was always very pleasant, although I found them to be a little difficult sometimes. I was not particularly close to John Lennon, or indeed to any of them. There was an occasion when John showed that he did appreciate, or was at least aware, what I had done in the management organisation. This was when a certain person wanted to take over the Beatles after Brian had died, but the idea was scotched at meeting during which the Beatles made it perfectly clear they didn't want this particular person to manage them. As they were going out John said, 'That'll please Geoffrey, won't it?' and it did please me, as I wasn't at all keen on those wanting to become involved.

Q So who were you closest too?

It's hard, perhaps because it was a long time ago, to recall one's own contacts with the Beatles. But as I say, I didn't get on terribly well with John, although he was cognisant of what I had done and what I wanted to do. George was perfectly pleasant. He was the first Beatle I met. I met him when I was visiting Liverpool from New York, before they were enormously famous. He came on a car ride with Brian and myself into the countryside outside Liverpool. He was very quiet then, but then he was perhaps the quietest of them all. Paul was and is charming; somebody that worked very closely to him said that he was a typical Gemini in that he could be very charming one minute and the next be very difficult, but I had no experience personally of that.

I did go with Ringo when he was making a movie. After Brian died, negotiations had started for Ringo to appear in a film which was going to be shot in Italy, in studios in Rome. The producers sent him their contract and I got hold of Ringo to tell him what was going to be expected of him. He said, 'That's all very well, but who's going with me?'



Brian had always handled the Beatles' affairs, and had looked after them, and he would certainly have gone with Ringo. On the spur of the moment I said I'd go, as I knew what was going to be expected of him. I went with Ringo and we all got on enormously well. His then-wife came and Mal Evans, the Beatles road manager, came as well. It was a lot of fun.

When we arrived in Rome there was a terrific flurry of press at the airport, and the producers, as part of the contract, had to supply him with a car on 24-hour call, and it was, to our surprise, a white Rolls Royce with a driver. We found that driving in the Rolls Royce through the narrow streets of Rome caused quite a stir. People would look at it and say, 'Hey, Signor Ringo!' as we passed by. Subsequently, Ringo decided it was too much and we arranged for another car, a perfectly good old Ford – I think it was a Console or a Zephyr – to be provided. The driver was furious because he loved his white Rolls Royce. We had a lot of fun on that trip and I found Ringo to be a very nice person, as I'm sure he has remained.

Q It must have been one hell of a time to be around!

Well, all the time I was involved with the Beatles, and actually with the early days of Elton John, it was the infamous swinging sixties. People look back at that period as a time of madness and hippieness and all the rest of it. Looking back on it, I think I was really at the eye of the storm, as I didn't really experience much of the swinging. I didn't go out clubbing with any of them at all, but it was an interesting period to be alive and to be associated with the madness, even if I didn't participate in a lot of it.

Q But The Beatles got into the whole scene, didn't they?

Well, they did, I suppose. I remember a few months before Brian died John bought a house in the countryside in Surrey. He wanted to live somewhere out of London. Not a very pretentious or grand

place, just a very nice house. He threw a big housewarming party to which everyone was invited. Fortunately, he asked me to stay at the house so I didn't have to go back to London afterwards, because there was a lot of drinking, and I'm told other substances were taken as well, of which I was unaware.

John arrived in his famous Rolls Royce, which had been painted in the style of a gypsy caravan. Lots of things happened at that party. For example, our US lawyer, who was a good friend of Brian, had for some reason taken off his shoes to dance, and Brian's secretary, Joanne Newfield, unfortunately vomited into his shoes, which didn't go down terribly well. However, it was all smoothed over, and I suppose it was all part of the fun. I was in a twin bedroom, and I went to bed reasonably early – although to be honest I don't remember much about it – as I was leaving for London fairly early in the morning. When I woke up I found that Kenny Everett, the DJ, was in the other bed. He was asleep, having got in very late, so I got up and left without speaking to him, though.

Q Apparently, Brian hoped to secure a million-dollar deal for the famous Shea Stadium concert in 1965. Do you remember that?

Shea Stadium was an enormous baseball arena which holds heaven knows how many people, and the Beatles concert there was a great success. The amount of money earned was vast, as usual, but it had been filmed for American TV, though for which network I don't recall, and Brian was anxious to secure a $1 million deal. In those days, no artist had ever received anything like a million dollars for a single performance on TV. Our New York agent, Norman Weiss, who was an extremely fine agent, was doing his best to try and up the amount for showing it on TV. Brian was continually nagging him to get the $1 million dollars. I think he had it in mind to get the headlines 'Epstein secures million dollar deal for Beatles'.

However, no network would pay that amount. Finally, we heard that $800,000 was the most that anyone was going to pay, and if we didn't accept this then it wasn't going to be seen at all. Brian was ill at the time, so he wasn't available to sign off the deal, so I agreed to the $800,000, somewhat nervously. I told Brian about this later and he pretended to be cross and disappointed in me, but in fact he was delighted, because although it wasn't the magic million dollars, it was still an awful lot of money.

Q Was the *Magical Mystery Tour* a flop in your opinion? Would it have happened at all if Brian had been around?
After Brian died in August 1967, the Beatles, particularly Paul, were determined to continue with a project which they had in the pipeline – that was to produce, perform in, and direct a movie themselves. This was the film which they called the *Magical Mystery Tour*. They were very keen on it. It wasn't a success when it first came out. There was a tremendous amount of hype in the press, but it was not critically well received. The film was then shown in America as well, and curiously enough, its reputation grew and grew until it became a sort of iconic movie on campuses all over the States.

In the end, the Beatles' faith in the project was justified, but it took a very long time. In fact, I was involved in part of the dealing for it because I went over to America to help try and sell it. I met an accountant who had done work for the Beatles, and we both trudged around, and I took it to three networks in New York.

The faces of the executives fell when they saw the *Magical Mystery Tour*. After the first showing at one network's offices I couldn't bear to go to the next, because it was such a depressing experience. I recall very well that it was snowing outside and we didn't have a car, as it seemed an unnecessary extravagance to have a limousine for something as apparently ill-fated as the *Magical Mystery Tour*. I remember taking the print of the movie in a film

can on the bus back to our hotel. I thought at the time that if the people on the bus knew that it was the Beatles film they would have been very excited. It was an odd experience.

Q Do you think they did struggle a bit without Brian?
The Beatles were very deeply affected by Brian Epstien's death, and they really didn't want to be managed in full by anybody else. As I said earlier, they turned down one person in particular. Who can tell what would have happened if he'd lived? As it happens, when he died, his NEMS management contract with them was coming up for renewal in a few months' time, so he would have had to renew that in order to be sure that they continued with him. He was a bit nervous about that, and he confided to me that although he thought there was no doubt that he would continue to be their manager, he felt that they were feeling their way to handling more of their own affairs. But I'm absolutely convinced that there would have been an association.

Q Did the Beatles take any great interest in their business affairs? Or was it all left to Brian?
Brian always made sure that the Beatles knew what deals he was doing for them, especially with the most important ones. I think they clearly took an interest in them, and they had a certain amount of input. Of the four of them, I recall that George Harrison was the most interested in the types of deal we were doing and in the financial side of things. I think the others trusted what Brian was doing implicitly. That's not to say that George didn't trust him, but he wanted to make sure that they were going to be well looked after financially, and so the others let it be, if I can coin a phrase.

Q Much has been made over the years of the fortune the group supposedly lost in the area of merchandising. What are your views on that?

The merchandising of the Beatles, the use of their names and likenesses, was absolutely enormous. Nothing like that had ever happened before, certainly not in the pop music business. It all started inevitably with Beatles wigs and that sort of stuff. Brian didn't want to have anything to do with that side of things. He was too busy with the 'artistic' side of their careers, so he really handed the merchandising side of their business to a firm of solicitors who did deals on behalf of NEMS with the manufacturers.

There was all sorts of stuff – dolls, watches, wigs, hundreds and hundreds of other items. The manufacturers and distributors who had nothing at all to do with the Beatles made a lot of money out of them. They paid an amount under contract to NEMS, but quite honestly it wasn't really enough. The solicitors involved had not secured adequate remuneration for the Beatles, in our view.

Click the above photo for a video link

Geoffrey Ellis describes Brian Epstein's attitude towards working with the Beatles.

Eventually some of the manufacturers, particularly in America, decided that they were not being well-handled. For example, an American company might be granted the rights for Beatles jewellery and then the people involved in London might sell the rights for, say, watches worldwide, which included America, but the people in America would get very angry because they thought that watches were included in their jewellery agreement.

This was the sort of confusion that arose, and inevitably writs started to fly in both directions, and eventually legal action had to be taken. We engaged a very high-flying firm of lawyers in New York who did a wonderful job, while various manufacturers appointed their lawyers in, too. There was a very difficult occasion where Brian had to go for a pre-trial examination where he had to confess that he really didn't know much about it. The lawyers for the other side said, 'Well Mr Epstein, you mean to say you know nothing about these deals that were making millions of dollars for the Beatles and for yourself?' It was just very embarrassing for Brian. Eventually the various writs were settled for a large amount of money on both sides. I'm not sure who came off best out of it, but it was a very uncomfortable experience.

Q Overall, do you have fond memories of your years at NEMS?

Thinking about my time at NEMS, my best and happiest memories are of the people involved. As I've said, I think there was a certain amount of amateurishness in the organisation, but it all worked very well. In an office of up to 20 people, I can't recall ever having any really serious rows. It was a pleasant place to be, although it was terribly hard work and you never knew what was going to happen next. Aspiring pop stars would come in determined to meet the Beatles; of course, there was no chance of that happening, and they had to be politely told to go away.

I remember that there was one chap who had telephoned and he wanted to see the Beatles or Brian Epstein and he was told that he

couldn't. They put him on to me and he said that he'd come all the way from Vancouver, and that he needed to see the Beatles. He was very persuasive, but I told him that he couldn't see the group because they were away, and that he couldn't see Brian because he was tied up and far too busy. As I say, he was very persistent, so I told him to come in anyway and that I would see what I could do. He came in later that day and he turned out to be a young college boy and was very pleasant.

So I pressed him as to why he wanted to see the Beatles. It turned out he had a certain amount of drugs on him, maybe LSD. He'd read in the gutter press that the Beatles sometimes used this sort of thing. I got a bit pompous about it and said that I was very sorry, but this wasn't something I could allow him to do or to help him with. He then said he would take it down to some clubs where he knew he could sell it. That was the last I heard of him.

Being a law-abiding citizen, I then telephoned our lawyers and asked what we could do about this chap. They arranged for someone from the drugs squad from Scotland Yard to come round and see me. I explained what had happened, and they replied that they thought they might know who it could be. I pointed out that if they did manage to catch him and it emerged out that he'd been trying to see the Beatles, there would be a great deal of very bad publicity for the group through no fault of their own.

The police said that if they did find this chap they would make sure the Beatles' name was not involved at all. I heard nothing more, and I don't think they caught him. I can't say that was a typical day at the office, but as I said, you never knew what was going to happen next. I suppose in a way it livened up the day!

Q Finally, Geoffrey, did you ever actually like any of the music made by the artists you were involved with?!

I've never been a big fan of pop music, really, even the music written and recorded by the Beatles or of Elton John. So it's

very hard to pick out a particular song. Sometimes I quite enjoy listening to their music, but I can't really say that any one song sticks in my own mind.

Sid Bernstein

Sid Bernstein was the man who promoted the legendary Beatles concerts in the United States.

He was, and still is, a colourful character who backed his own judgement, leaving a well paid job at General Artists Corporation to set up on his own in a notoriously cut-throat business. Bernstein's company was based on his faith in the Beatles, who were huge the UK and Europe, but hadn't even had a hit record in America. Hardly anybody knew them, but Bernstein had read enough to believe that one day they would also be big stars on his side of the Atlantic.

Somehow, via a telephone call, Bernstein managed to convince Brian Epstein to let him promote their first concerts in New York. That he proposed Carnegie Hall as a venue probably appealed to Epstein's sense of theatre. It was world-famous, it was prestigious, and it didn't usually stage pop shows.

By the time the Beatles appeared there on 12 February, 1964, they had indeed had hits in the States, and, probably more importantly, they'd made a tumultuous appearance on the all-

important *Ed Sullivan Show* on TV only a few days previously. The two Carnegie hall shows, which were staged on the same day, were both sold out, while thousands milled around outside in the streets around the theatre.

Sid Bernstein also promoted the famous Shea Stadium concert in August 1965. The figures for the show make interesting reading. It grossed more than $300,000 at the box office, but because of the cost of security and insurance cover, Bernstein's profit came to less than $7,000. The Beatles played for just 28 minutes. Bernstein is particularly proud that he and Epstein always did business by gentleman's agreement – no contracts were made between them.

As with so many of those who came into contact with the Beatles and did business with them, Bernstein's life was changed by the experience. He became the manager of many successful acts and ran his own record label, but whatever he achieved later in his career stemmed from his involvement with the group. He liked Epstein, he liked the Beatles as people, and he still holds them in great affection, as the short extract from a recent interview which follows clearly shows.

Q Sid, when was it that you first met and worked with the Beatles?

When I first worked with the Beatles, I hadn't met them before; it was like a mail order romance. I bought them without ever really seeing them. I called their manager, Brian Epstein, and he told me I was the first American to call them. I offered him something he couldn't resist – a show at Carnegie Hall.

The Beatles were unknown in America, but I'd been reading about them. I said I'd bring them here. They were becoming stars not just in Liverpool, but across the entire UK country, and in Europe too. I bought them because the language was the same as the States, and kids in England, Germany, and France were all responding to their music.

When I saw them for the first time and presented them at Carnegie Hall, I met them at the Plaza Hotel before they went on. They weren't overwhelmed and they had no attitude. They looked out and saw hundreds of kids waving and singing their songs. Once stung by a Beatle, you're Beatle-ised forever. The songs will never escape me; I hear them day in and day out. That music is here forever.

Q Did you like Epstein, and was he easy to work with?

He was very bright and a very proper Englishman, like the kind you see in old movies. He dressed and spoke beautifully. He was a gentleman. We never had a contract; our deals were done over the phone. The most dramatic moment of my life outside the birth of my children was when Brian Epstein said yes to Carnegie Hall, then the following year Shea Stadium, and the year after that Shea Stadium again.

Q You're obviously still very fond of them all.

Let me quote a friend of mine. He's sitting right next me at Carnegie Hall at a Jimmy Cliff show. His name is John Lennon. He badly wanted to see the show, but it was sold out, so I asked my children to give up their seats so John could have them. I often took my children to things I was excited about or involved in. They didn't recognise the name Jimmy Cliff, the reggae artist, so they said, yes, as long as I let John know that they had given their seats up for him! So I had called John up and told him that the tickets were at the box office.

Now Carnegie Hall was the scene our first professional engagement together. The whole audience knew John was in the audience, so during the intermission he decided to stay seated and people respected his privacy. He asked me what I had been doing lately and I told him I was working on a couple of new concerts, and that my wife and I had a second child on the way. I asked him what was new with him.

He replied, 'You know Sid, at Shea Stadium; I saw the top of a mountain.'

I said, 'You know John, so did I.' These are moments that not too many people experience in this business.

Q Didn't you have a hand in getting the Beatles on the *Ed Sullivan Show*?

I don't claim credit for it, but I had a hand in it, as you say. Ed Sullivan – I got this story first-hand from his son-in-law, who was the producer on many of his shows – had been travelling across Europe to get to Heathrow to take a plane back to native New York. At Heathrow, he saw a bunch of kids holding up signs and posters saying 'We love the Beatles' and 'Welcome Home Beatles'. The group was coming back to England from Germany or France or somewhere. He asked an airport attendant who the Beatles were. Ed Sullivan used to present a lot of animal acts, so he thought it was something to do with that. The attendant explained that they were England's most popular singing group.

Ed had someone in his office check out the Beatles, and he learned that a New York promoter – that was me – was presenting them. I'd met Ed Sullivan a couple of times when I was an agent handling acts at the Sullivan show for the agency. The secretary called me and said Sullivan had found that I was bringing the Beatles over on 12 February. I said that this was correct, and that I thought they were a phenomenon.

I don't know if that did it, but when I next went to Carnegie Hall I was talking to this lady who books all the acts on the Sullivan show. She asked me who this group was, and I said that they were a phenomenon in Britain. She handed me a contract, which I signed.

The rest was history. They came to New York and they did the Sullivan show. Ed Sullivan bought them over three days prior to my day. He put them on the show on Sunday, the ninth of

February, and I put them on at Carnegie Hall on 12 February. If it wasn't for the Beatles, I wouldn't still be in the Bronx, but I might still be a tailor's son gone to college and been an accountant.

Q Your most treasured memory of working with the Beatles?
It's that first meeting, and looking out of the eighth or tenth-floor window at the kids in the street below. The Beatles were giggling, saying they didn't get that kind of reception in England. They said it was unbelievable. They were very impressed and very modest.

Q Could anything like them ever happen again, Sid?
It's unlikely, I guess. I don't know, but I doubt it. It was a unique time in the US, a time when we had just lost a young President. We were still mourning. They came at just the right moment and all of a sudden the sadness was lifted.

Andy White

Andy White has the distinction of being the only drummer other than Ringo Starr and Paul McCartney to appear on an official Beatles record while the group still existed.

White was a fine, reliable, in-demand session drummer, one of several brought in by George Martin for sessions at Abbey Road. Others included the brilliant Clem Cattini, who found fame as a member of the Tornadoes and played drums on an incredible 45 number-one singles, Ron Bowden, a marvellous player who played with the country's greatest jazz musicians, including Kenny Ball and Chris Barber, and Jimmy Nicol, the man who became a temporary Beatle when he stood in for the unwell Ringo for ten shows during 1964.

Andy White was, therefore, part of a particularly exalted group, and Ringo Starr's heart must have sunk when he arrived for the *Love Me Do* session on 11 September, 1962 to find him setting up his drums. Not that Ringo had much choice in the matter. Having been unconvinced by Pete Best's drumming at an earlier session,

George Martin wasn't about to take any chances. He didn't know Ringo, hadn't heard him play, and therefore had no intention of jeopardising another.

There were two versions of *Love Me Do* recorded during that September evening session. The one featuring Andy White was released on the first Beatles album, while Ringo's performance made it onto the first single.

And so Andy White unwittingly became part of Beatle folklore. He was paid about a fiver for his efforts.

Q I suppose lots of young kids want to play the drums when they first get into music. Was it the same for you?

I guess it was. When I was 12 years old, I joined boy scouts and the troop formed a pipe band. I got into drumming through playing in the pipe band, and that was the beginning of it. Through pipe bands I met a couple of guys; we were all drummers, actually, in different bands, but one of them took up saxophone and one took up trumpet and we decided to try and form a group. We were particularly interested in jazz at that time, so we were trying to imitate Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. You can see that we had pretty big ideas!

Q Ah, but did you do a good job of it?!

Not bad, actually. Not bad. The only thing was that with the first gigs we ever had, at which people quite reasonably expected to dance, we found we couldn't play a waltz, so we were in trouble!

Q Are you self-taught?

Not really. I was taught quite a lot in the pipe bands, and if you actually progress in that field it becomes very intricate playing. If you get into better and better bands, as I did, your playing improves no end, so you finish up really with a greater technique than you'll need, say, for playing jazz or anything.

Q How did you get your break into the professional music world?

Well, through playing in Glasgow and doing lots of dance gigs, we had a big rehearsal band which tried to play Stan Kenton music, so we got good breeding experience in the business. Before that I had to serve an apprenticeship in engineering as a pattern maker. I don't know if you know anything about that, but it's to do with making moulds of cast iron and metal. The pattern maker has to make the real thing in wood first, which they then use to make an impression in sand before they pour the metal in, so it's quite an involved trade. By the time I'd finished the pattern-maker apprenticeship, I was looking forward to becoming a professional musician! I began in a ballroom in Ayr on the coast of Scotland, and for about a year I played in a band there. Then a couple of us went down to London from there and started to get involved with the whole rigmarole in the capital. I don't know if you'd be aware of Vic Lewis's band? I played with Vic for six years on the road.

Q You played the 100 Club and all the other great venues?

Not so much the 100 Club, but we did most of the other clubs. Ronnie Scott's hadn't quite opened back then, but in Soho there were lots of clubs. I also played in a jazz group for maybe a couple of years, and because of that we started doing different kinds gigs where we began to play kind of rock 'n' roll in sessions.

But funnily enough, when we were with Vic's band, we went over to the States for three weeks; they had a kind of exchange thing, whereby if an American band came to Britain, then there had to a British band go over there for the same period of time, so that's what we did. We went over. The funny thing was, they put us into a rock 'n' roll show. We only did about 10 minutes on the show, but it was very good for me because there were all sorts of stars on it. Top of the bill was Bill Haley and the Comets, and there were all sorts of people. So I got to hear rock 'n' roll as

you should hear it, which stood me in good stead, because you're watching these very good people every night for three weeks.

Q Did you actually like rock 'n' roll?

Oh yes, sure. I quite liked it, sure. They had a great band on that show – Buddy Johnson, a big black band. They were tremendous. It was great listening to them every night. They had the loudest drummer in the world, without amplification! I started getting a reputation as a rock 'n' roll drummer, which was all right. It certainly helped me to get session work. I did some recordings with Billy Fury, who was a big name then, and I also played on a rock 'n' roll television show that he was starring in. I got work with Marty Wilde, another big star. There were all sorts of people in there. I also did some recordings for Jack Good, the famous producer.

Q Had you heard of the Beatles before you were called in for a session?

Well, yes, I had, oddly enough, because my first wife was a singer, Lyn Cornell. She was with the Vernon Girls, and she came from Liverpool. The Beatles were the most popular band in the city, and of course she had heard of the Beatles, and she talked to me about them, but I'd never heard them play or met them until that day in the studio.

Q So how did the session come about?

The funny thing is, it's usually thought that George Martin booked me, but he didn't, really. It was just a quirk of fate. He couldn't make that morning session, so he had a guy called Ron Richards, who was also a producer, book a drummer. I'd worked for Ron Richards quite a lot, so he booked me, because I was a rock and roll drummer, you see. He actually did the session, and George came in towards the end of it, but at the start there was just Ron Richards and myself. I spent most of the time learning

the routines, because they didn't use written music, but they had routines for those numbers. So I would rehearse with them to get the breaks and things like that. They'd been playing for a while and had a routine for each number. We'd work on one until we had it the way they wanted it, then we'd start doing takes, and when we'd finished that we'd go on to learn the next one.

Q What was your impression of them as a group?
I was impressed with them, mainly because they played their own music. In those days it was quite often the case that British groups did covers of American hits, and in fact the Beatles went to Decca first of all and played covers of other stuff and they were turned down. The guy who turned them down must be kicking himself still! But at Abbey Road, through George hearing their own material, they did their own stuff, and that's what impressed me. I thought it was so different from what was going on.

Q Do you know why you were called in? Were you told?
No, I didn't even know who I was going to be playing with. They just asked me to be at Abbey Road in 10 minutes one morning and to bring my drums.

Q So Ringo was there. Do you know why they decided not to use him?
Ringo was there and I've no idea – no idea.

Q What was Ringo's reaction to it?
He didn't like it very much. But he didn't say anything at the time, apart from just being introduced and saying hello. He talks about the experience still, though.

Q So he didn't have to show you what to do?
No, no. [laughs]

Q What numbers did you record? Were there many takes?
We didn't do as many takes as is sometimes said. It all went well; it was quite good, and we just got on with the stuff. We did *Love Me Do* and *PS I Love You*. We also did a take of *Please Please Me*, which I think was released on the first album, although Ringo played on the single version, which was a big hit, of course. I can tell it's me on the album because of the drum sound – I tuned my drums differently to Ringo.

Q So which records did you play on, Andy?
I played on just that first single, which was *Love Me Do* with *PS I Love You* on the B-side.

Q But as far as the public knew, it was Ringo on drums?
As far as the public were concerned, yes. It was about 20 years later that they brought the 12-inch single out with both versions on it, both Ringo's version and mine, and Ringo's version of *PS I Love You*. So there were two of us playing the same arrangement of the same song, so you take your pick, you know!

Q Having heard them and played with them, did you think the Beatles would make it big?
Well yes, I did. Yes. And *Love Me Do*, *Please Please Me*, they're still my very favourite Beatle songs!

Q Do you consider them a great rock 'n' roll band?
I thought they were very good, mainly because they brought their own unique style to what they did.

Q Your favourite drummers from that period?
Well, Ginger Baker, who was a great jazz drummer before he turned to rock, I liked his work with Cream and also with Ginger Baker's Airforce, the band he formed after Cream. John Bonham

was another I liked, and let's not forget Charlie Watts from the Rolling Stones.

Q Was Ringo rated as a drummer in those days?
He probably was around the Liverpool scene…

Q Of all the sessions you've done with bands and artists over the years, which are the ones you'll always remember?
There were so many, really, but the big ones were Tom Jones' *Its Not Unusual*, which still sounds good, I think. We did a good cover of Lulu doing *Shout*, which was her first hit, also.

Q Do people know you as the man who played with the Beatles?!
You're joking! No! And I don't tell them.

Q Did you stay around in London as a session musician?
Oh yes. Yes, I did theatre work for a while, as well. I did the London run of *Stop the World*, by Anthony Newley. We used to do the deputising in theatres, you know, standing in for the drummer. I did things like – well, lots of shows, like *Company* and *Sweet Charity*. It was a good thing to get into if you were doing sessions during the day, and you can do a couple of shows at night. I also worked as an accompanist to Marlene Dietrich for about 11 years. Not all the time, maybe for a couple of months a year – three months at most, maybe – which I'm proud of. She was very good to her musicians. She was very nice, although she made you lazy, too, because all we did was the one show, the same thing exactly, and you only ever did it once a night. Apart from that, the nice thing was going round the world three times, all over the place.

Q And what are you up to now?
Well I've come full circle and now teach drums and bagpipe bands. I also do judging of the drumming in the bands at Highland Games.

Neil Innes

For those of us of a certain age and sense of humour, Neil Innes can do little wrong. He's been involved with some of the funniest things I've ever seen or heard on film, TV, or record.

Being in the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band wasn't a bad start to his career. Innes's great musicality and sure touch with a tune perfectly complemented the eccentric genius of Vivian Stanshall. Their best material is absolutely timeless. I defy you even now to listen to *Canyons of Your Mind*, *Jollity Farm*, *Mr Slater's Parrot*, or *Hunting Tigers* and not smile, despite how familiar they've become over the years. The Bonzos were recently persuaded to take to the stage once more and undertake a short tour to celebrate their fortieth anniversary tour, where they were joined by such modern comedy luminaries as Steven Fry, Adrian Edmonsen, Phill Jupitus, and Paul Merton, who tried their best to take the place of the dear departed Vivian. The tour was an outstanding success.

In 1974 Innes became a Python. We heard him on the Live at Drury Lane album doing *How Sweet to Be An Idiot*, which is

actually a pretty song. What joy to see him in *The Holy Grail*, prancing about as the chief minstrel behind Eric Idle's brave Sir Robin, who was 'Not all afraid to be killed in nasty ways'. When danger reared its ugly head, he bravely turned his tail and fled.

And then there was The Rutles, which along with *This Is Spinal Tap*, has to be best pastiche and piss-take ever committed to film. Ron Nasty – what a man! It was Innes's fabulous songs, with their clever Beatle references oblique enough to avoid a lawsuit and subtle enough not to stop the songs from being enjoyable in their own right, which really stole the show.

Neil Innes's involvement with the real Beatles came when he was still in the Bonzos. They made a memorable appearance in the *Magical Mystery Tour* film, singing the delightful fifties-styled *Death Cab for Cutie*, and then when they came to record what proved to be their biggest hit they were able to call upon the services of a certain Apollo C. Vermouth as producer.

A splendid time was had by all, as Neil Innes recounts in this brief extract from a recent interview.

Q Neil, you rubbed shoulders with the Beatles on the *Magical Mystery Tour* – how did that come about?

Shoulders, knees – rubbed all sorts of things. No. Well, we were peer groups, you know – the Beatles and the Bonzos. We'd all been guys in the van going to gigs and things like that, and we were known for mucking about. You know, there's a lot of bands and well-known artists. I mean, Eric Clapton, for example, used to say, 'I wish I could muck about like you guys; I've always wanted to come on stage with a stuffed parrot on my shoulder,' but he couldn't. There were posters everywhere saying, 'Clapton is God'. It just couldn't be done. So they were all jealous of us mucking about. So with the Beatles it was all share a pint and have a laugh.

Q You ended up in the *Magical Mystery Tour* film. How did that come about?

Well, the Bonzos were working with the Scaffold, which was a well-known comedy and song trio in the sixties. Alongside Roger Mc Gough and John Gorman, there was Mike McGear, who was actually Mike McCartney, Paul's brother, and I think it might have been Mike who said to Paul, 'You've seen the Bonzos. Why don't you put the them in the film?' Paul apparently said, 'Oh, yeah – good idea,' because Vivian Stanshall used to hang out with Paul and John. John used to drop him off at his flat in the early hours of the morning in that disgusting floral Rolls Royce.

So, in our case, we were mucking about and not taking ourselves seriously, and in the Beatles' case it must have been nice to meet somebody who wasn't screaming at them and probably knew a bit about where they were coming from in terms of the old art-school background.

Q And the song that ended up in the movie was *Death Cab for Cutie*.

Well it was the only thing we had at that time that would remotely fit the groove of a Beatles film. It had a kind of Elvis feel and tinge to it. That song was probably the only song Viv and I ever wrote together in the same room; we found this sort of true-crime magazine, and one of the stories was *Death Cab for Cutie*, so we just fantasised and built the song around that.

Q One of the other surviving pieces of film is the *Canyons of Your Mind*, where Viv turns up on this giant…

Vivian was a closet papier-mâché fetishist. He was always making things, you know – rabbit hutches that sort of thing. At one time, you went up the stairs in his house and there was this life-size rear end of a zebra, so, I mean, so there was nothing to surprise any of us. He could be infuriating, he could be a brute, but he got away with

things; there was just something about him. When he walked onstage he was dangerous. 'What's this guy going to do next?' You know.

There were things that irritated me. For example, he used to spend far too much time learning fancy chords like a flattened B6. I would say, 'Never mind what it's called, Viv; does it sound right?' You know. And he would not let his lyrics go, you know. He was almost like a chimp doing a painting, and sort of you'd have to snatch them off him. I'd say, 'Look, they're great. Leave them alone,' but he'd fiddle and fiddle and fiddle. So I mean that's the only criticism I had, but I mean if that gives you an insight into the way his box of frogs worked, you know.

Q You and Vivian had some fun with your producer Gerry Bron when Paul McCartney got involved with *I'm the Urban Spaceman*, didn't he?

Gerry was a gent. Yes, he was. I mean he really, really tried genuinely hard to get things right. You know he was Manfred Mann's manager as well, and it was Manfred who put us on to Gerry Bron, and he really did try, but I mean the Bonzos were unmanageable, and with hindsight I think that what we did to him over *Urban Spaceman* was terribly unfair.

Unfortunately, and to be fair to us, Gerry was a terrible clock-watcher in the studio, though. He had a very set view, and that was that three hours was enough to record a track. I remember him saying, 'I don't know what's got into Manfred Mann, it took him eight and a half hours to make *Ha Ha Said the Clown*!' So Gerry's only fault was he was a bit of a clock-watcher.

Well, at the time we had all these ideas, and we wanted to different things, and we didn't want to spend three hours with one eye on the clock. Viv was moaning about it one day, and Paul McCartney said, 'Well, I'll come and produce it.'

Poor Gerry, you know. Viv went to see Gerry and said, 'We don't want you to produce this single.' Bear in mind that we didn't

even want to make a single, you know, we were having our arms twisted.

And Gerry said, 'Well, who do you think you're going to get to do it then?' And of course Viv has his Jack Benny moment – you know, dramatic pause. 'Oh, it's Paul McCartney, actually.' But the cruellest thing we ever did to him, I think, was to say, 'Well, we don't want Paul's name on the record.' Poor Gerry! Gerry, I'm sorry. You were one of the best.

Q Can you tell me about recording *I'm the Urban Spaceman* with Paul?

Well, the day came when we had to go and record this *Urban Spaceman* song – I think it was at Chapel Studio in Bond Street – and we were all waiting there, and Paul turns up, and after he's said hello to everybody he goes over to the grand piano and he says, 'I've just written this,' and he starts playing what turns out to be *Hey Jude*.

I remember thinking it was really funny, you know, because he knew all about the clockwatching thing and already he was wasting time, you know! And of course this song goes on and on and on, and I was giggling, sort of looking at Gerry – 'Hey Jude/ Don't make it bad' – I don't think even the Beatles had yet heard it. But as we went on, though, he said to me, 'Never mind if we're not recording, you just keep singing it,' and he said to Larry, 'You know, you're doing this kind of thing; we'll track the drums,' you know, and before you knew where you were the track was going places. There's no doubt the magic touch was there. Then Paul grabs Viv's ukulele and he just comes in, 'Linki dinki dinki ding.'

Actually there was a lovely moment when Paul was at the microphone doing his thing, and Lillian Bron, Gerry's wife, came into the studio. She'd never been to a session before, but because Paul was there – anyway, she came up to him and said, 'What's that you've got there? A poor man's violin?'

And Paul says, 'No, it's a rich man's ukulele'.

So a lot of fun was had by all. And then at the end, you know, Viv had got out his garden hose with the trumpet mouthpiece and the funnel and wanted to whirl it round his head. He used to bring in this box of goodies, but I don't think we'd ever seen that before, although it became part of his thing. We said, 'What on Earth have you got there?'

By now we're probably into the eighth or ninth hour of the session! And the engineer said, 'What the hell's that? You can't record that.'

And Paul said, 'Yeah, you can. Just put a microphone in each corner'. So that was another 20 minutes, just so Viv can whirl this contraption around his head! And out of that expensive session came probably the Bonzos' best-known record.

THE BEATLES

The Magical History Tour

MUSIC LEGENDS